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POLITICS ON  
THE BLACKBOARD

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THE PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT

CITIZENSHIP THROUGH THE NEWSPAPER

YOUNG CITIZENS

THE LEAGUE—ITS SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

ENGLISH ON THE JOB

THE BRITISH MONARCHY

(work-book)

# POLITICS ON THE BLACKBOARD

*An Autobiographical Essay*

*by*

KATHLEEN GIBBERD

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## INTRODUCTION

About thirty years ago a subject called Civics or Citizenship began to appear on the timetables of some British schools, usually as a weekly lesson for the sixth form. At first it stirred up a mild controversy among teachers, some of whom felt that sufficient light was shed on public affairs from the lamps of history, and that any direct and purposeful illumination of contemporary institutions would only bring party politics into the classroom. This misgiving, to which I remember listening anxiously at a conference in Oxford in 1923, was mostly voiced by those who had only considered the question in the abstract, and contrary to expectation, it did not depress the parents. Indeed, those whose children began to learn the new subject reacted with enthusiasm and even with envy.

Nevertheless the progress made by this newcomer to the curriculum was halting, and up to the Second

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World War it was still the exception to find public affairs, by whatever name it was called, taught below the sixth form—where it was useful for candidates who had to take general papers in entrance examinations to the universities. This meant that most boys and girls were not learning it at all.

The war came and passed, leaving as before a new impetus to education. This time it was world-wide and partly prompted by a demand for schooling from millions of people in the interior of continents who could not read or write. Educationists are still busy discussing this phenomenon, but behind their new terminology—‘mass education’, ‘fundamental education’, ‘community development’, and the like—literacy lessons to backward peoples are being accompanied by simple lessons in Civics. Even in countries which are reckoned as advanced a new emphasis on citizen education is to be found, while the totalitarian states of yesterday and today have never been in any doubt about the need for citizen *formation*—the French word is more precise.

What has happened in Britain? ‘Social Studies’ is now commonly found in the curriculum of the newly formed secondary modern schools, while most, if not all the examinations for the General Certificate allow economics or public affairs to be offered; otherwise citizenship training remains much as before. But let the Ministry of Education answer the question. In a pamphlet entitled *Citizens Growing Up*, published in 1949, it says: ‘Social Studies in schools take a number

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of different forms. In many schools, for example, it is usual to devote one period a week to some study of parliamentary or local government, a period which is often illustrated by a subsequent visit to a meeting of the county or municipal council. . . . From local beginnings the study sometimes extends further—to Parliament, to the Empire and Commonwealth, to the life and institutions of foreign countries.

‘The value of work of this kind is indisputable. . . . Yet these developments are still for the most part experimental and they are by no means universal. Too widely, political and social studies of this kind are regarded as “extras”.’

At this point the anonymous author, who is holding up a mirror to the schools, not urging a course of action, begins to wonder whether after all these lessons are really so important. ‘Is this enough?’ he asks. ‘Is it even the right approach?’ True to the English educational tradition, he is glad to get back to a theme he has already pursued: it is in the spirit of the school itself, in its prefect system, its games, its emphasis on the development of character, that the future citizen is truly formed. ‘To wear the uniform, to be a prefect, to play in House and School teams, to share the school tradition—these are powerful influences. . . . They are often the earliest visions of deep and abiding sentiments which broaden into citizenship of the world.’

It is to question this attitude, especially in regard to girls’ schools, that I have written this book. I share with Mr. Newsom the belief that women’s function in

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society is different from men's and I hope that what I have written will supplement his cautious pronouncements in *The Education of Girls* which appeared in 1948. I write, however, more to open an argument than develop a thesis and to give data rather than theories. Educational ideas too often soar from reality until one forgets what children are like and that they do not necessarily learn what they are taught. I have therefore sought to ground my subject by writing autobiographically, hoping thereby to avoid fallacious assumptions as well as to enable those who have not been educated in girls' schools to gain some inside information, and those who have never taught to see what teaching is like.

Most of what I recount happened between the wars and although nearly all of it could happen today there have been some changes. In particular the relations of teacher and taught have been greatly eased by the confident attitude towards grown-ups which children now have from an early age.

I have used pseudonyms throughout, some of them transparent, some accompanied by other disguises. If I have inadvertently invented a name that belongs to someone in similar circumstances to those described, I ask in advance that the coincidence may be excused.



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**I**t was on a spring day in the 1920's that I was interviewed for my first job as a teacher. I had come, as arranged, to the small country town where my prospective headmistress lived in the holidays, and now I sat among the chintzes and the flowering bulbs of her drawing-room. I was feeling faintly self-conscious about my clothes, and with good reason, for I wore a brown straw hat and a navy blue frock, unrelated to one another and without style. I excused myself to myself about them on the grounds of recent illness and unemployment.

Miss Luce came in. Some of my headmistresses proved to be very different from my first impressions of them but Miss Luce was always as I first saw her—quiet, considerate and rather abstracted. I was not to know that her abstraction was a byword, and that on occasion she would walk out of school prayers leaving the assembly on their knees because she had forgotten

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to pronounce the final prayer. She was immensely tall and this added to the feeling of natural superiority that she conveyed.

She spoke first of my friend whose place I was to take for a term, a geography specialist. I knew no geography—or at all events not enough to teach—but the friend who was nothing if not resourceful had proposed that I should teach civics instead. It seemed to me that I knew no civics either. What was civics? A post-graduate year at the London School of Economics and a year’s work among factory girls did not give me the answer, although these seemed to be the qualifications prompting the suggestion. I was to teach some English also, but that was the subject I had read at Oxford, so there was no mystery there. Miss Luce said that my time-table would be light because I had been ill and she hoped the healthy life after my year in the slums would put me right. I am probably the only woman who took to teaching as a rest cure.

Over tea I tried to answer Miss Luce’s questions about the last two years. I had gone to the London School of Economics to train for social work. In those days the social science course which was taken by all intending social workers required the student to spend a third of the time with some charitable organization, but alternative practical work was sometimes accepted and in my third term I had, at my own request, been allocated to a women’s trade union. With my vague intention of becoming a factory welfare worker this was a move in the right direction, but things took an unex-



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pected turn and I found myself outside instead of inside the factory gates. The union offered me a job on its organizing staff where women from the universities and factories worked together under three remarkable pioneers—Mary Macarthur, Margaret Bondfield, and the brilliant but formidable Susan Lawrence. Thousands of girls had gone into engineering factories during the war, and many of them remained on unskilled or semi-skilled work. The men’s union would not accept them and it was our business to make them—and others like them—good trade union members. It sometimes meant haranguing them as they came out of work, standing on a borrowed chair at a street corner. But this I did not like to tell Miss Luce.

Indeed it was difficult to convey to her or anyone who had not experienced it what life was like in the slums of East London after the first war. Besides the young girls newly at work there were the old women who had been at work most of their lives. I thought for example of the rag-sorters who came to our evening meeting with shawls over their heads and their hands often infested with sores. One had to teach them how to claim sick benefit as well as collect the fourpence a week which entitled them, among other things, to a respectable funeral. There was also, in London and the Midlands, a host of stalwart women who had suddenly lost their jobs in the post-war unemployment crisis. The causes of unemployment were not then understood by the public at large, and while at weekends my middle-class friends told me that anyone who really wanted work could find

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it, during the week I had to control and console angry crowds who cried out that it was work they wanted, not charity.

‘It really amounted to educational work?’ suggested Miss Luce. I said that I supposed it did. But of course it was I who had been learning. There had, as a matter of fact, been one venture into formal education. I had collected seven or eight quiet girls from an engineering firm for a course in industrial history. On the first evening I had described to them the system of land tenure in medieval England, which had seemed to me to be the proper beginning. Huddled in their shoddy overcoats, my students had listened patiently, but they did not come back the next week, or ever again.

‘In your letter’, went on Miss Luce, ‘I think you said that you had taught for a time in a boys’ school?’

‘Only for three weeks,’ I said. That also had not been much of a success. It was a vacation job, happily picked up at the end of my last term at Oxford as a means of paying for a holiday. The small boys had thrown paper darts, tipped with ink, whenever I turned to write on the blackboard. I neither went to it nor left it with any notion of taking up teaching as a profession. Nor was that my idea now. Once again I only wanted to earn some money.

The sum arranged seemed quite handsome if only I could manage until the end of term when it would be paid. But the appointment was a resident one and the school high up on a hill, away from expensive urban pleasures. Miss Luce explained that the girls of her

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school all came from well-to-do, privileged homes where hitherto they had only been expected to take their places in society. The war, she said, had changed all this and it was now important that they should learn to be responsible citizens. I saw later that she was one war ahead in her views. I saw then that my appointment was not just a ready means of filling a gap for a term, but something of an experiment.

In the few weeks that remained before the beginning of the summer term I tried to find out what was meant by civics. The dictionary defined it as ‘the science of citizenship’ and in the citizenship section of a public library I found two recently published books. One gave some bare bones intended for university extension students. The other, which was meant for school use, had a little flesh to it. It began with local government and went from that to the machinery of central government—an order that I later found to be generally recommended because, people said, one must proceed from what is close at hand to what is far away. I chose it for class use despite its rather moral tone.

When I sat down to digest this book I found that a good deal of it was as new to me as I guessed it would be to my pupils. It was assumed then, and the assumption still holds good in some circles, that we know automatically how our political machine works: what part the sovereign plays, how far the House of Lords can still affect the making of new laws, how exactly a law is made, why there is an hour for questions at the beginning of the parliamentary day, what is the differ-

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ence between the political head of a ministry and its permanent secretary, and all the rest. For my part I had gone through my school days, my Oxford years and even three terms at the London School of Economics, with a hotch-potch of inaccurate ideas on these matters and unaware of my confused ignorance. What I had learnt of politics I had learnt at home. At school, history had stopped short half way through the nineteenth century. Contemporary affairs were only presented by means of cuttings from *The Times*, pinned on a blackboard in the hall where they could be read before or after lessons, or during the morning break on wet days. But only an eccentric, or someone covering her solitude would have stood there long enough to grapple with a difficult vocabulary while other children sauntered with their friends or rushed in pursuit of them.

When the day came for me to arrive at Miss Luce's I was nervous. The taxi-driver outside the station beamed when I gave the name of the school and charged a large sum when he delivered me at the door. The educational agency which normally handled vacancies at the school was said to have described it as 'for the daughters of the nobility' and I anticipated a noble demeanour from everyone within. In the staff-room, however, I found ordinary friendly women and, to my surprise, the children whom I later observed through the window looked ordinary too. They were like any other schoolgirls, with straggly hair and unformed features. I was greatly relieved.

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In the privacy of my small bedroom, where I used the marble washstand as a desk, I rehearsed my first civics lesson. Despite the text-book I had decided to begin with national rather than local affairs, for if I knew little of the one subject, I knew even less of the other. I had a feeling, too, that it would be easier to make king and parliament interesting than mayor and borough council. I was heartily afraid of boring my classes. This may have been because the habit of compelling attention was ingrained by months of open-air speeches where on occasion I had had to start off on an empty street; or it may have been that I was afraid of indiscipline. As it turned out I need not have worried on either of these scores; the main difficulty that I met was quite unexpected.

It happened in my first lesson with the twelve to thirteen-year-olds. After some fifteen minutes in which I explained to the rows of upturned faces the meaning of civics and then embarked on the functions of the sovereign a hand went up to signify a question. I had no sooner answered than another hand followed, and after that two more. I dealt with these and continued my lesson as planned in the notes on my desk, only to be politely interrupted again; and so it went on.

The questions were genuine expressions of curiosity and put in no carping spirit. When I explained that the king had certain nominal powers which by custom he no longer exercised, they wanted to know what would happen if he decided to use them. Supposing, for instance, he did not like a new law and refused to give

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his consent—what then? But could it really not happen? Supposing he disliked someone on the honours list presented him by the prime minister, must he nevertheless award the honour? It said in the paper the other day that the king had visited an exhibition; did he have to go, or could he decide what he did? Who then decided for him?

One question prompted another, and some were irrelevant to the matters under discussion, but resulted from their minds running ahead into the new territory of a new lesson. Did the king go to parliament? Did members of parliament have to attend? Supposing one of them decided not to go at all? Did I think that women ought to have a vote? (This they answered for themselves, mostly in the negative.) How could a lord be a member of the House of Commons? Why were the miners on strike?

This experience was repeated in the more senior classes in varying degrees and at first I was entirely pre-occupied with trying to give such answers as I could, and as were to the point of the current lesson, and yet keep to my written plan from which I did not dare stray far. It was only later that I realized that I myself was being taught how to teach my subject. If I strayed into theory their minds began to close down, and had I, like some of the text-books, exhorted them with moral talk about a citizen's duty, I should merely have locked myself out. From sheer incompetence, desiring above all else to hold their attention, and knowing no other form of discipline, I did what they wanted: I came down to

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earth. I told them, not what was meant to happen, but what, as far as I knew or could find out, actually did happen. And the more I told them the more they wanted to know.

It might be thought that this lively curiosity was to be explained by the stately homes from which Miss Luce’s pupils came. I thought so myself at the time, but I was wrong, as I hope will appear later. As a matter of fact even the older girls were unaffected by the public life which, in some instances, was led by their parents. They had grown from nursery to schoolroom, and now they had come away to school because their parents held Miss Luce in such high regard. I cannot believe that their governesses and nurses discussed affairs of state with each other, or that their young charges would have listened if they had.

From king and parliament I progressed to courts of law, how justice is maintained, and what happens to malefactors. This led to an open-air debate on the well-worn theme of capital punishment with the principal speakers haranguing the audience from a stone terrace. The oratory was very high-flown and we were all impressed. Yet, like so many school debates, it was really of little value. The subject was remote, the arguments were invented or collected at second hand, the emotion was spurious, only the bolder ones spoke, and success, as in all debates, was a matter of scoring points, not of arriving at the truth.

However, this I was to learn later. At the time I thought that evening was the high-spot of my term’s

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work, not realizing that the day-to-day work in the classroom where the children were drawing plans of the seating arrangements of the House of Commons, finding out what had happened to the House of Lords in 1911, distinguishing between the lord chancellor and the chancellor of the exchequer, disputing the respective disadvantages of direct and indirect taxation, learning about juries, J.P.s and probation officers—that all this, assuming it stayed in their minds, was more important than high-flown rhetoric about the sanctity of human life or the efficacy of deterrents.

A year or two ago, an educationist of high standing in Britain inveighed against the absurdity of teaching children ‘the mechanics of government’ and was supported in the educational press by a young critic. As far as my information goes neither had ever taught politics to children under any name or by any method. For myself, I have no doubt whatsoever, that the mechanics of government—or as I would prefer to call them, the instruments of democracy—must at some stage be taught. To expect a citizen to play his part without this teaching is like expecting the double bass, the viola or the flautist to play an orchestral part without any musical instruction. But most people have not learnt these fundamentals of politics and have only been encouraged to play a part. Hence some of the excruciating dissonance in our world of public affairs.

To return to Miss Luce’s. My term drew happily to its end. I was getting over the alarm engendered by my



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older pupils and finding a rare delight in teaching the youngest who were about ten or eleven. ‘So that is why the miners are striking, and they are striking still’, is a sentence that I can still see with memory’s eye at the end of a short exercise written by a child called Margery. I must sometimes have talked to these children about the news of the day, for Margery, I remember, impressed me by getting the essence of the matter in the way a child will. This is not to say that I think it always advisable to teach such young children either current affairs or citizenship.

With an easy time-table and a free hand I had the luckiest start. With the enthusiasm of the children for a new subject I had begun to think well of myself. Most of the staff were middle-aged and except for a music mistress I was easily the youngest. I cherished the impression that the children regarded me as unlike a schoolmistress and more as a contemporary. I merely flattered myself, however, as I found in the last days of the term when I was invigilating for the examinations of Form II. The children had gone out for their break and I walked round the desks to collect the spare foolscap. I stopped short at the place of one called Priscilla, a rather naughty child, who I was sure was attached to me, for once when I was correcting her neighbour’s work she had most engagingly put her forefinger into my cupped hand. On her pink blotting-paper I now saw a grotesquely drawn figure with outstretched arm. Underneath was scrawled the caption: ‘Old Gibberd ringing the bell’.

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After the term's work I looked on teaching in a new light—not as a dull process of imparting the same information year in year out, but as a job with young minds and personalities that was full of surprises. The children—we called them all that, though the older ones were seventeen or more—were like people on the far side of a stream wherein one had to find stepping-stones by which they could come over to knowledge and enlightenment. Some of them faltered and needed a helping hand, others sat down half way and were diverted by small discoveries that had escaped the adult eye. A few came over briskly and waited critically for further directions.

Thus when, in saying good-bye, Miss Luce suggested that I ought to make teaching my profession, I was ready to act on her advice. It must be said, however, that circumstances pressed the decision home. I had little prospect of returning to the trade union where

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capable working women were now quite properly filling all the appointments. As for the more conventional forms of social work, there were very few openings in those days.

Judging by the educational advertisements there were plenty of jobs going in what would not be called girls' grammar schools and I thought that if I could get myself into one of these as an English specialist I might be allowed to teach civics as a secondary subject. Alternatively, and more to my taste, there were the 'progressive' schools which had begun to appear before the war and were now rather in the limelight.

As it turned out my preferences did not count. The advantages which I treasured weighed lightly in the eyes of headmistresses, and looking back I find myself on their side. 'Trade union organizer' must have looked startling against 'Previous employment' on the application form, and Miss Margaret Bondfield, whom I was so proud to quote as a referee, was probably thought of as a subversive influence by those who were treading just behind Miss Buss and Miss Beale. Miss Luce had given me a generous testimonial, but what guarantee was this that I could keep order with grammar school girls or even bring them to examination pitch? True, an Oxford degree was desirable, but it did not outweigh the lack of appropriate training or solid experience. As for civics, what would the governors have to say if this was taught by a dangerous radical? Better keep it, if it was included at all, in the hands of the history specialist where it properly belonged.

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So I found myself obliged to go for half a term to a provincial private school called Harpley House. Its owner, a nondescript woman called Miss Rime-Smith, confided to me that it was her dearest wish to make her school like Miss Luce's. She hoped I would compare the two and make any suggestions.

Nothing, however, could have been more different from Miss Luce's school than Miss Rime-Smith's. The sorry premises, the dirty staff-room curtains, the bread and potted meat for supper, the lack of apparent purpose—all these made comparison derisory. Only the children were not totally dissimilar, for though of different social origin and seemingly abandoned here by parents abroad, they were just as teachable. In the dowdy classroom where desk impinged on desk, my first civics lesson produced exactly the same response as before and even the same questions. In the evenings, the older ones, squatting round the anthracite stove, would discuss the world outside and life in general rather more seriously than had Miss Luce's sixth form. Deprivation made them in certain respects more mature.

I left this temporary job under a cloud, as the end of term marks, with their percentages and averages, threw me into a confusion and I made some inconvenient mistakes. With a bad conscience I returned again to the process of filling up forms and writing letters of application. Eventually I was interviewed by the vice-principal of another private school—a pale and dispirited lady dressed in beige. She offered me the post of

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English mistress at a school in the country, south of the Wash, called Hugonfield.

It was the vice-principal, I soon found, who did the work. The principal, Mrs. Batterson-Browne, sat about and received parents. The children liked her, but did not care much for her husband who was a retired army officer with a military moustache and manner. The premises were a pretentious mansion built, I believe, by a war profiteer. Inside, many of the walls were lined with mirrors; outside there were fanciful stone balustrades with columns surmounted by stone balls, some of which were falling from their positions. Beyond these there were pleasant grounds and when the flowering shrubs were at their best Mrs. Batterson-Browne had a party for parents. The staff bought new clothes for this occasion, but we could not vie with the opulent impressiveness of our guests nor the regal bearing of our principal. A B.A. does not make up for a bad dress and our sense of inferiority drew us apart from the main throng and left us, a subdued group of fawns and navy blues, hunched against the rhododendrons. Had we but known it the perfumed and fluttering mothers also felt inferior when they looked in our direction, abashed by the amount of knowledge that must be contained under our good but uninteresting hats. But it is always easier for the well-dressed than the well-educated to keep their ends up, and when a smiling mother or genial father bore down upon us to thank Miss Arnold for bringing Pamela along so well with her music, or Miss Bennett for giving Valerie extra help with her arith-

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metic, theirs was an easy success and Miss Arnold and Miss Bennett became agitated with gratification.

If schoolmistresses will trouble to dress well and believe in themselves, they can work through a parents' party like a harvester-combine in a cornfield, but in those days none of us did dress well and I remember gawky groups of schoolmistresses at much nicer schools than Huguenfield. For in most respects Huguenfield was not a nice school at all. There were a few girls there at reduced fees and everyone knew it. They had inferior bedrooms, with less air and more beds to the cubic space, and they were expected to show their gratitude by exemplary behaviour. Happily some of them were natural conformers, but one was not and her tiresome but guileless misdemeanours were built into a load of guilt by Mrs. B.B. and some earlier vice-principal had applied physical violence, knowing that the child's parents could not afford to protest. The child, a wiry little thing, had returned blow for blow.

The sad vice-principal was preoccupied with details and particularly with meticulous neatness. One day I took her a list of names which she wanted in a hurry. I had written them in the neat clear hand which I reserved for her alone and I had folded and carefully torn off the unused half of the paper because she disliked wastefulness. But she asked me to write the list again because the raw edge looked too raw. She also believed in repressive discipline. 'You must be *down* on these little people', she would say, referring to the children under twelve.

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This was the first time that I had full responsibility as a teacher of English and I enjoyed it, especially in the summer when I could take my small classes out among the sunbaked bracken in an untended part of the grounds. Civics was very much a secondary interest for the time being and 'Current Events' which I should have liked to teach was the prerogative of the Colonel.

Every Saturday morning the senior classes assembled in the largest form room and the Colonel and I faced them from the teacher's platform. My rôle was the combined one of chaperone, disciplinarian and first-aid officer, but I was never called upon to act in any of these capacities. It was, however, necessary for me to listen to the Colonel's lecture, so that I could do some private tutoring later in the weekend when, twisting in torment at their desks, the girls tried to do the written work which the Colonel required of them.

In his retirement this officer of the former Indian Army had replaced his loyalty to army orders by a civilian devotion to Printing House Square. What *The Times* said was right, and, as he explained to me, he could think of no better training for citizenship than a daily study of this journal's leading article. His lecture usually began by his reading this aloud in full, and at the end of this text he would deliver some axiomatic remarks by way of elucidation or commentary. The girls in their pink and blue uniforms stared at him blankly and made despairing notes which were of little avail when the doom of the written exercise was upon

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them. They were simple creatures, mostly from the homes of the newly rich, and not unwilling to receive the 'good education' for which their parents were paying high fees; but what the Colonel said had no meaning for them, and what they wrote for him in their essays had no meaning either. Nevertheless, by making judicious extracts from the leading article and adding a few of their own notes, they managed to present something which passed muster with the Colonel who, pleased to see the fine-sounding phrases reappearing in girlish script, gave them the benefit of the doubt.

The tedium of these Saturday mornings was hard to bear and it was years before I could read *The Times* leaders without prejudice. It is probable that the Pamelas and Valeries, with their double-barrelled surnames, now middle-aged women, have never read them since. But for myself, the chief result was that I longed to try my hand at this kind of lecture. The chance came before a year was out.

At the end of the year I left Hugenfield, handing in my resignation and scorning to ask for a testimonial. This put me in something of a fix, for now there was an awkward gap in my short and motley list of backers. In vain I wrote letters of application to respectable grammar schools and successful progressive schools, stating that I would explain in an interview why I had left Hugenfield, and pointing out that I would like to teach Civics or Current Affairs. Eventually I went to a large and successful private school that was partly



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modelled on the public school from which the headmistress had come, although her enterprise could not keep to any prototype.

Miss Radice had built Saltlands from an insignificant establishment into a day and boarding school that won the praise of the then Board of Education and the admiration of the seaside town where it was situated. It had become the cultural centre for the permanent population. Coming celebrities, such as Myra Hess, gave concerts in the school hall, audiences came from far and near to see the summer plays personally produced by Miss Radice in the school garden, and a local branch of the Workers' Educational Association was born with the blessing of this tireless principal who did everything at the double whether she was off to a committee meeting, a tea-party, or evensong.

I had greatly taken to her at my interview and I liked her even more on arrival at the school. 'I have just had two days in London', she said as I panted after her across the garden. 'Oh,' I said, 'were you at the educational conference?' 'No,' she said, 'the Midnight Follies.'

On the first Sunday in term when I sat in the common-room among a dozen other young schoolmistresses I heard one of them ask: 'By the way, who is doing the Current Events lecture now that Ronaldson has gone?' 'Miss Radice herself, I expect,' said the senior mistress from behind her *Observer*, and at first no one heard me say rather self-consciously, 'No—I am'. Then the young woman in the next chair realized I had

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spoken. She exclaimed—and all the newspapers and novels went down as they stared at me—‘You poor thing!’ was what they all said.

I blushed, at first because I thought they would think it strange for the English mistress to take on the lecture, and again to remember my presumption in asking Miss Radice to let me do it, and yet again to find myself so surprisingly the object of wondering pity. I wished a bell would summon everyone to fire drill or that one of the absent ones would come in and cause a diversion, but nothing happened, we all sat on and I asked why they were sorry for me.

First of all, they said, the children heartily detested the lecture and secondly Miss Radice took it very seriously. Thirdly there was so little time to prepare it and Miss Ronaldson used to groan every Sunday afternoon, swimming about in a sea of newspapers, in the hope of finding something she could talk about on the following day. After this explanation they began to wonder why this misfortune should have befallen me and not the new history specialist, so there was nothing for it but to explain that I had asked for the lecture as for a favour. They then took the line that in some schools it might be interesting to teach current events, but not here. The Saltlands girls would not take to it and anyhow there were three forms together at the Monday lecture, so how could anyone strike the right level? If you aimed at the lower fifth the sixth would yawn and if you aimed at the sixth, the lower fifth would play about. Eventually they tried to encourage

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me by saying that it would be easier for me if I had done it before.

But the fact was that I had never given more than an occasional lesson in contemporary affairs, and it was only through listening to the Colonel's weekly performance that I had conceived the notion that I could do this sort of thing properly if given a chance. Now I was in despair. I was still raw enough to be rather afraid of any new set of older pupils and the Saltlands girls had appeared more formidable than any others whom I had encountered. Judging by conversations overheard in passages, they knew more about horses than I should ever know about current politics. Threshing about in my mind for some original way to begin a lecture I suddenly thought, why give a lecture at all? Someone had once told me that I ought to run a mock parliament. I would do so now, instead of the lecture that they did not want and that I dare not deliver. In this way was my most successful experiment born from nervous apprehension.

As I had an English lesson with the sixth form in the morning I asked them if they thought my idea was a good one. I was surprised to find them mildly interested and they helped to give shape to my rather vague notions. Sophisticated though they appeared to be, they were nevertheless clearly gratified when I asked them to be cabinet ministers.

Thus it came about that on my first Monday afternoon I did not talk about the civil war in China, the fall of the French government or the reassembly of the

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British parliament after the Christmas recess, but concealing my nervousness as best I could, I invited everyone present to choose a constituency, presented some tough-looking young women as ministers of the Crown, and introduced myself as Madame Speaker. At least I had the satisfaction of close attention, if not of smiling approval, as I went on to explain that since we were constrained to learn about the events of the week, we must regrettably make some modifications of the procedure at Westminster. However, we would occasionally debate a bill. More often we would listen to an explanation of fact or policy, but every sitting would open with a number of short statements about what had been happening, and these would take the place of question time. These statements, which I called reports, would be given by themselves, the honourable members of the Saltlands House of Commons. But they must give notice to the appropriate cabinet minister, of the subject chosen, and in good time. During the term every honourable member must appear at least once on the order paper and I hoped that they would exercise their right to question each other so that an atmosphere of lively discussion would prevail.

As soon as it was understood that I really meant that everyone would have to get on her feet at least once in the term and speak aloud, there were groans of alarm and dismay. Speak in public—and that was how they saw it—they felt they could not do, and this conviction was shared by the most talkative members of my English classes as well as by the more reticent. I interrupted the

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protesting chatter that now broke out to finish my opening speech by offering them a choice between my new proposal and a return to the customary lecture.

They preferred the parliament even though they could think of no way of having it without speeches. But now they asked if they could not form political parties? I said no, I wanted to rule out party politics, and there were murmurs of disgruntlement. They were not enthusiastic over my alternative to the party system, but listened patiently while I explained it. It would be the task of the Government, I said, to arrange the programme for each weekly sitting and those members who had confidence in the Government's ability to do this would sit on the Government side of the House. Those who doubted their capacity, or preferred to be critical would sit opposite. The Opposition would be free at any time to move a vote of no confidence in the Government, and if they could persuade the House that the ministers were not doing their job properly and carry their motion to a successful division (for we should have makeshift division lobbies) then the Opposition would become the governing party and their leaders the new ministers. The Opposition, I said, would be well advised to have a shadow cabinet. I suggested that they should divide themselves there and then into Government and Opposition parties, each girl following her fancy. The Government party, of course, would be on my right.

Everyone got up and all but a mere handful immediately walked over to my left. By the time the school

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bell went for the next lesson, I had, not without difficulty, persuaded enough of them to change their party to enable our scheme to be put into practice the next week.

I went to Miss Radice that evening and told her what I had done. She fixed me with her penetrating eyes—the younger children thought she could really see into people's minds—and told me not to be discouraged if the three forms lost interest after half a term and wanted to go back to the lecture. I suppose my face fell, for she put a kindly hand on my arm and reminded me that the young quickly tire of new schemes. However, I need not have been despondent for the parliament lasted eighteen years and only closed down with the closing of the school in 1941, when some bombs came too near. By that time the scheme had been transplanted in several other schools.

At first the Saltlands House of Commons was uninspiring. During the preliminary quarter of an hour which was our substitute for question time, the honourable members would get up, in dull succession, and deliver scraps of information about fire or flood, the death of a notability, a rebellion in South America or the activities of the Royal Family. They read monotonously from scripts copied directly from *The Times* or the *Manchester Guardian*, stumbled self-consciously over unfamiliar names and subsided at the end with a sigh of relief. If they were questioned, they often lost their assumption of dignity and cast a look of forlorn appeal at the Chair. All this covered a general and genuine

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nervousness over what they called 'speaking in public'. Hardly one of them showed the same embarrassment in ordinary lessons, but three classes together, half filling the school hall, helped to produce an unfamiliar formality (which they nevertheless liked) and the subjects of their speeches belonged to a dim outside world which had not yet been illuminated by the B.B.C. Wireless was still in its early days and people who had sets listened with earphones.

The longer speeches which followed these short reports were at first given by the ministers or other senior girls—or occasionally by myself after an explanation that no real Speaker would dare to intervene in this way. Some of the children immediately showed a gift for lucid exposition and the second part of the sitting was more interesting.

The first thing that I found I must do was to prohibit the reading of written speeches. This was not a popular edict although everyone preferred to listen to what was freely spoken. Some of them now learnt their pieces by heart, but others soon acquired an easy way of speaking from notes. I then had to persuade them to express what they had to say in their own words and not in what they called 'newspaper language'. This meant work behind the scenes, when as teacher rather than Speaker, I tried to help the less able to understand what they proposed to talk about. It soon transpired that some girls who could not distinguish themselves in examinations or games could impress half the school with elementary oratory. More important still, some of

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the shy ones, having got over their first nervousness, enjoyed a new-found confidence in themselves. This ancillary usefulness of the school parliament was something unforeseen.

It was the responsibility of the cabinet, as I have already explained, to ensure that all the matters on which we informed ourselves on Monday afternoon were worth our attention. At their weekly meetings where I was unofficially present, the subjects of the proposed reports were approved and the speeches that were to follow were arranged. Occasionally we planned a debate, to be led off with two prepared speeches, and now and again we discussed a bill. Most members wanted, as they put it, 'to pass a bill', but this kind of mock legislation turned out to be less interesting in the event than in prospect. It was also difficult to fit into our limited time since a real bill goes through many stages before it reaches the Statute Book, including three prolonged debates in the Lower Chamber. If we disposed of a bill in one debate we were, in my view, departing too much from proper procedure and I felt it to be important that there should be no misunderstanding about the careful process of real legislation. We therefore introduced our bills one week by one of the accepted methods for a first reading and then had a full-dress debate on the second reading with a division the week after. The bill was then referred to a standing committee (which was not standing at all but appointed for the occasion) who presented their report the next week, when the bill also came up for the third reading.



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By that time everyone was heartily tired of it and I do not remember that we ever troubled to send it to the House of Lords and thence to the sovereign for the Royal Assent.

We had by this time acquired both an Upper House and a sovereign. The House of Lords provided an answer to the question: what should be done with the members of the school staff who wanted to listen to the sittings? We arranged a row of chairs for them and called it the Peers' Gallery, and when some of them wanted to join in our deliberations we had to make a special concession, with the usual apology to the British Constitution. Some of the staff came to attend regularly and this infusion of adult knowledge and wit was universally enjoyed and helped to keep up the standard of public speaking. As for the sovereign, Miss Radice was persuaded to undertake this rôle so that we could have a solemn Opening of Parliament at the beginning of each school term with a speech from the Throne on the troubles of the world which awaited our attention.

Our improvised party system gradually came to work quite well. After a period of tranquillity the Opposition members would suddenly begin to be critical of the Government and charge it with allowing trifling matters like sporting records or the birth of quadruplets to get on the order paper; or else some Government supporters would weary of their confidence in the ministers, and, changing their allegiance, appear one Monday afternoon on the Opposition benches. Greatly encouraged, the Leader of the Oppo-

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sition would then give notice of a motion of censure on the Government for failing in its responsibility. A division would follow, with members going off in different directions to be counted in the lobbies, and the Speaker, receiving the fateful figures from the tellers, would announce the Government's defeat amid the stamping of feet and the prevailing conviction that a change is a good thing.

This parliament, because it made the children read the newspapers and at least assume an interest in the world at large, fitted in with Miss Radice's hope and purpose for her school. She was a devout Christian and thought Christianity should be expressed in social service. She was never better pleased than when her seniors decided on some form of social work as a career or as a voluntary occupation, never more hurt and perplexed than when, as occasionally happened, they went in for dog-breeding. She had a mixed bunch in her school and some resisted her high demands for hard work and a good life because their family backgrounds pulled another way. But since the children all held her in some awe they could not openly show resistance. This I think explained the atmosphere of discontent which was the first thing that struck me as I went from class to class. But it did not last. I probably arrived at a transition stage when the horsey girls were dominant and had not yet given way to those who came to the school, not merely because it was convenient and well spoken of, but because their parents wanted them brought up according to Miss Radice's principles. Also,

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as time went on, the staff lived less apart from the children—a development that Miss Radice at first distrusted, but afterwards approved. They were a young and lively staff, but also, in many instances, intellectuals. Perhaps some of the children learned from them that intelligence can be quite becoming, while others got the mental stimulus they wanted. But the reins remained always in the hands of our benevolent autocrat.



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**A**fter five years at Saltlands illness in the family brought me home and for two years, while I was partly tied by domestic obligations, I did supply work, taking on the jobs of teachers who had fallen ill or who were enjoying that rare delight, a sabbatical term. All these schools were 'public' in one sense or another. Among schoolmistresses, what used to be called the private school—the word independent has now replaced it—has always been looked down upon and the cream of the profession has mostly gone to the schools which are public in what might be called the Etonian sense and the high schools and grammar schools, which are public in the sense of being publicly owned.

The high school at Skillington was an endowed grammar school. I went there to teach English and to look after Form III B while the permanent form-mistress was recovering from influenza. Political subjects did not figure in the curriculum and any citizen training was

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through the life and discipline of the school. The social mixture was unusual for an English school: about half the girls were not only fee-paying but came from county, professional and wealthy business circles, while the rest were scholarship winners from elementary schools and their fathers were plumbers and prison warders. I thought the cultivated headmistress, whom I could not but like, was pleased with this combination and valued both sets equally, but I may have been wrong, as a colleague who served longer under her disputed this with me.

The discipline of Skillington High School reminded me of my own school days in that silence was required in passages and cloakrooms and staff or prefects had to be posted about to see that it was observed. But it was not successfully enforced. At the end of the day, when the children were hurrying off, no one took much notice of the mistress on duty outside the cloakroom. The first time that I took up my 4 o'clock stand there, I was elbowed and buffeted as rich and poor alike made for pegs and pigeonholes. It appeared that each girl was talking as much as she wanted, or had time for, and when I intervened I merely got an irritated look. It was all very odd after Saltlands where there were hardly any silence rules and where people who knocked into you politely apologized.

Behaviour at Skillington was measured by stars and stripes and order marks, and one had to exhort one's form to gain the stars and avoid the symbols of moral failure. My daily admonitions to III B during

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the three weeks when they were in my charge seemed to bear little result, but some time afterwards, when the memory of the school was already growing dim, I received a smudged postcard bearing the following information: 'I thought you would like to know that I didnt get a strip this week. I hop you are well, with love from Pompilia Martin.'

I had often ruefully reflected on the way in which circumstances had forced me among the well-to-do children and away from the working people to whom, as a social worker, I had originally been drawn. At Skillington I indeed taught both social extremes, but sitting in class or hurtling along the passages they were indistinguishable. The school uniform had a levelling effect. Now there came an opportunity to teach girls who came exclusively from humble homes.

The Allenby Trade School took girls at fourteen and gave them two years' training in upholstery, millinery, dressmaking, tailoring or cooking with some general education thrown in. This last consisted chiefly of English and history and a friend of mine, a scholarly woman, who found that having a free hand largely compensated for clementary work, was in part charge of it. When her colleague fell ill I gladly stepped in.

I had a week or two in which to prepare myself and, incredible as it may seem, I toyed with the notion of beginning a social history course in Ancient Egypt. I had forgotten, I suppose, that earlier failure with the factory girls, and forgotten too, what I surely must have learnt

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by then, that you cannot plan precisely for children you have not seen. What you really want is your whole bag of tricks.

On arriving at the staff entrance on my first day I came upon a large register below a clock and I was told to write my name and the exact time of arrival. This is the only time I have been told to clock in at any kind of school and I am sure that the requirement has disappeared from the few curious places where it existed between the wars. I protested at the humiliation and was advised not take it seriously as everyone, I was assured, signed themselves as arriving at 8.50 unless they arrived earlier.

After this registration the sight of three staff lavatory cubicles, with doors many inches above the floor and more inches from the ceiling, giving as much privacy as the continental convenience for men, was hardly surprising. There was a subtle suggestion in all this disregard of sensibilities that the teachers employed here were merely the more delicate parts of a machine in which safeguards had been made to contravene every kind of frailty.

A bell sounded and two hundred pairs of feet clattered towards the gymnasium where one of the trade teachers—confident women who took things as they found them—conducted morning assembly. I went to one of the bare trade rooms, furnished with long trestle tables, to await my first class. There would be forty girls arriving in a few minutes (two second-year classes together), and I would have to occupy them for

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two hours since this was the usual period, and obviously a suitable one, for trade lessons. (It was sometimes three.)

Up the stairs, chattering and laughing, came the milliners and dressmakers. Subduing their voices, they streamed into the room and settled themselves at the trestle tables, dividing their interest between the new teacher, whose ingratiating smile did not convince them, and their next-door neighbours, whose close proximity inspired conversation.

What exactly happened next I do not remember and if I once had a record perhaps I later decided to destroy it. I only know that I set off on the downward path to failure. My friend and colleague used to say that she did not mind if some of the class were inattentive. So long as the rest would let her teach them it was enough. What else, she said, could one do? It was reason that I could not apply. I could not forget that Maureen was fidgeting with Ivy's bangle and not hearing what I said in my interesting way about the powers which the king had but did not use. Everyone else was listening, but I must have Maureen and Ivy too. It was the same when I was teaching English composition—Doris, Eileen and Ada, I perceived, had a secret joke with which I could only successfully compete when I told a story, and I could not always be doing that. I was slightly distracted and showed it, as one does by voice and manner. This broke the spell for some of the others so that there were soon a number of girls who had found alternative interests.



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The permanent teacher whom I was replacing for a few months had used what even then had been called old-fashioned methods. 'Stand up!' she would say. 'Sit down'. . . . 'Hands on laps'. . . . 'Open note-books'. 'Take your pens. . . . Is everyone ready? . . . Copy what is on the blackboard.' Had I been wiser I would not have so loftily despised this regimentation, but adapted it to my own use. It might have been the best way to begin. As it was I fell between the old and the new and found the two-hour lessons an hour and a half too long. It was three times the normal lesson period, but it was supposed to include the reading or written work that in a grammar school would be set as homework. It was too long for children to sit at book work, which is very different from sitting with your needle.

The groups varied. The cooks, for example, were rough, the milliners refined. They showed disapproval differently, the cooks by exclamation, the milliners by lamentation. In their different ways each group expressed their dislike of *Cranford*, which was one of the three novels available for their private reading. Some of them would grudgingly read *Silas Marner*, but mostly they preferred to read *A Tale of Two Cities* for the second or third time. In the first few weeks I tried out every kind of English or civics lesson that had gone down well in other schools, but nothing except listening to a story or copying a ground plan of the House of Commons kept them all attentive for as much as a quarter of an hour. I observed myself becoming louder voiced, openly exasperated, and using what all chil-

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dren, and especially workers' children, feel to be a dishonourable weapon—sarcasm. Finally I lost my temper outright with a pretty little milliner. She sulked. I blushed.

I had to go on with the job for several more weeks. What could I do? There were no visual aids in the school, for people had not yet thought of such things. There was no wireless. It was no use going to the headmistress, Miss Chubb. She was a kindly, ample woman who had been head of an elementary school. Seldom seen, her presence evoked respect from the girls. She allowed the staff to get on with their own work without question or interference, so long as they made no trouble for her with the local authority. She was openly pleased to have two Oxford graduates undertaking the general education of the school, a pleasure such as she might have got from seeing English classics behind a glass door. If I had complained about the girls she would doubtless have given them a talk about their good fortune; if I had blamed myself she would have been at a loss and taken a poorer view of the universities ever afterwards.

What was to be done? Teaching is not like writing. You cannot destroy a chapter and begin it again. Every lesson you give in a new school puts fetters on you for all your future there; you create a certain impression, of power or weakness, knowledge or ignorance, calm or irritability, and the general expectancy that you will continue like that makes a kind of fate for you. There is nevertheless usually some way of escape. I felt

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rather sheepish about the one that opened up for me. It was essentially lowbrow.

I gave up formal teaching and got the girls to *make* things, working singly, in pairs or in groups. They made newspapers and 'books'. They cut out pictures from the daily press and looked up information in an outmoded reference book. The school had no equipment except for the trades, but when children need things they get hold of them. So it was here. But I felt that I had saved my self-esteem at the expense of the children, until one day when I watched them busily occupied, the transformation from irritable indifference to contented activity was so impressive that I thought there might be some advantage for them too. I jotted down some notes on the classroom scene then and there. I reproduce them here:

'Twenty children of 14. (The junior classes came singly, only the senior classes took their general education in classes of 40 or 60. But the scene would have been the same.) Low mentality. At two long tables some of them sit writing, painting, pasting, sewing. At another table three girls stand up to paint, regardless of chairs, having apparently chosen a quiet corner. Another girl always goes to a fourth table by herself.

'The tables are crowded with books, leaflets, encyclopaedia volumes, cigarette cards, paint boxes, paste bottles, scrap paper, scissors, tracing paper, drawing paper, brown paper. Floor untidy.

'Some talk incessantly. Some write, trace, draw or paint, absorbed and silent. Some sing. Most of them

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comment on what they do to no one in particular. Every other minute someone asks if she can go for a book, for paint water, or to look up information. One girl seems to be doing nothing but turn the pages of an encyclopaedia and read.

“There is a passing wrangle when one girl jogs another, or seizes her brush or paper. R. is sewing up her book on Russia. F. and G. are binding New Zealand. M. brings up her book on Australia to which she has added a map as an afterthought. W. is writing laboriously and silently with conversation all round. B. is perplexed over paint that won’t dry. C. comes up with a volume of the encyclopaedia, “Can I go down and get C A L instead of C A U?”

“One girl to another: “Let’s look. Ain’t that good!”

“The other girl, who is tracing an Indian: “If you push there’ll be an end to the old man”.’

As might be expected, the appearance of their finished productions was better than the content. A journal entitled *News to Interest All*, which I still have, is written in columns of exemplary script and the illustrations have been pasted in with an enviable neatness, but the news is concerned with the lighter side of the contemporary scene. Hardly any of it in fact was worth writing down at all. It runs to thirty pages.

Had I stayed long enough I might have seen that one could build from this beginning. One could have had a direction, though not a plan. The girls might have come to see that their workmanship was much better than the thing it adorned, like embroidery on butter

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muslin, although it would have been too discouraging if they had realized how great was the discrepancy. For more intellectual girls who easily go in for a similar wastefulness if allowed to do so, such a shock could be salutary. I remember correcting competition entries on some current affairs subject where sixteen-year-olds from a famous school had covered pages of foolscap with heavily factual sentences that had clearly been pirated, and maps of fine penmanship. The maps, naturally, had been traced, and the rest I tracked down to an encyclopaedia.

What would have been silly would have been to assume that tailoresses and dressmakers could learn their history through clothes and the cooks through food. This is the kind of thing that educationists mean when they tell you to build on the children's natural interests, assuming that you can tell as easily as that what those interests are. The interests emerge in the kind of free activity that I have described, although the term was hardly used at that time. But they do not always emerge clearly, rather the reverse, and the building process requires infinite resourcefulness and energy from the teacher. Moreover children often get bored next week with what entranced them last week. I was lucky in that the boredom did not come before the end of term and the end of my temporary appointment.

In the next four schools there was no scope for any lessons in citizenship, although in the last of the four, as I shall recount, I was at variance with my head-

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mistress on this question. They were all reckoned to be good schools of their kind and in each case the parents would certainly have been proud to say that their children were pupils there. I am sure that on speech days and on other suitable occasions the chairmen of the governors would have said that the schools were building character and training citizens of the future. I shall try to say enough about each one to enable the reader to judge the merits of such claims.

The first, Mellicott Hall, was in the heart of lovely country. The house was an undistinguished mansion, the grounds, with their spinneys, wandering paths and lake, enchanting. The school itself had been well endowed by philanthropists; it ranked as a public school of the less expensive kind and was held in high esteem in the circles which it served. I went there to replace the senior English mistress who was also a house mistress and form mistress of IIIA. When I moved into her bed-sitting-room where there was an open fireplace, comfortable furniture and bookshelves filled with the English classics, I felt a surge of optimism. In such a room one might read, reflect and let the beginnings of wisdom take root.

As it turned out the room was no more than a refuge. One could occasionally escape there to do corrections and one gratefully crept into bed there at night. Mellicott Hall was run according to a rigid plan. The staff, especially those who were 'house mistresses' (which meant that they were in charge of a landing) worked the plan from 7 o'clock when the first bell of the day

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got the children out of bed, until 9.45 when the thirtieth and last bell told them to go to sleep. In the interval one saw that beds were made, windows opened, rooms tidied; one operated a tea urn, served porridge and bacon, apportioned stew and jam tart, talking suitably throughout each meal; one entered bad marks, gave bad marks, reorganized preparation time-tables, supervised preparation, conducted walks, aided, exhorted, admonished and consoled the children of one's form and listened sympathetically to the worries of house prefects so that they at least should go to a dreamless sleep. But all this of course was only the husk; the kernel of every day was some five hours' teaching, the preparation of lessons for the morrow and the correction of up to sixty written exercises including work for higher certificate. The plan worked, but at a price. The code of behaviour that it embodied was sacrosanct, so that when a little girl hid some biscuits in a shoe locker, the whole staff was in a ferment of indignation and the prefects with them. The pleasures of the surrounding woodlands were only known to the birds and rabbits, who pursued their lives with little intrusion from their human neighbours. Gaiety, the privilege of the young, was frost-bitten, and when we sang at prayers, 'Looking upward every day, sunshine on our faces', it was like a dirge and no one even hid a smile. At best the children learned to be good in a negative sort of way, but they can hardly have learned not to be stupid. Even the work they did was narrowed to the strictest requirements of an examination, as the following analysis of a

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general knowledge and appreciation test will show. The test was set by me to thirteen girls who were sitting for their higher certificate examination later in the year.

'No one knew the meaning of programme music, what a proton was or the difference between a star and a planet. The majority did not know why the Prime Minister was visiting the United States (his journey was mentioned every day after breakfast by the vice-principal in her five-minute extracts from the news), who the Sitwells were, or what were the distinguishing features of Norman architecture. Six did not know who painted Mona Lisa, only one could distinguish between psychological and psychical, two did not know which country was a communist state (one said it was America). In ranking various artists and writers in order of merit, all but one put Barrie above Marlowe, half the class put Jeffery Farnol in front of Hardy, Meredith and Walpole, Gilbert and Sullivan before Wagner.'

I set this test to discover whether my own assumption that the children were being very narrowly educated was right. The full list of questions and answers which I still have is a gloomy confirmation. Some of the answers are surprising even so. The prime minister, one of these sixth-form girls said, was going to America 'to inspect the American Constitution'. One girl knew that Mussolini was the head of a Fascist government but did not know in what country. Another one wrote: 'People live on a planet, or are supposed to, but the stars are too cold to be inhabited.'

Admittedly one would get better answers now,



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twenty years later, but there are still schools where a narrow kind of learning allows girls of seventeen to remain singularly uneducated, where knowledge outside the examination syllabus is false or vague. ('A proton is something to do with science'.)

The next two schools are pleasant to recall. The first was remarkable at the time both for its size and discipline. Six hundred was then a large number for a girls' grammar school and most headmistresses would have thought it far too large for the application of what were rather slightly known as 'progressive' methods. But not Miss Kellaway. She would not run her school like a regiment, with classes marching down the corridors in silence and prefects policing the route. The usual paraphernalia of small penalties was dispensed with and 'free discipline' replaced it. I was not under her long enough to find out how she worked out all the implications of this misunderstood method, but no one could be in the school a day without being aware of its pleasant human atmosphere.

The beginning of my first day was a surprise and a delight after some dreary weeks at Mellicott Hall. A bell went and the corridors thronged with girls making their own way to the assembly hall. It was like an orderly crowd of adults although the eldest were nineteen. No one scrambled or giggled, conversation was normal. An organ sounded from the hall where each girl went in silence to her appointed place. The place was packed, but where I stood, at the side and more

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than half-way from the front, no one could be seen talking or signalling or eyeing those in authority. Nor did they look bored. The hymn-singing which followed would have gratified any parson looking for a proper response from his congregation, and so would the attention which Miss Kellaway got when she read from the Bible. She was a slight figure far away on the platform and I might have guessed at once the respect and affection which she evoked. After the prayers which she read without any forced emphasis we remained kneeling to sing a devotional hymn. It was as if each girl was singing to something in herself. They stood up refreshed, if only by emotional release.

I seem to have enjoyed every lesson in those crowded classrooms. There must have been some difficult forms or at least difficult children, but I do not remember them. I know that like everyone else in the school I had easy access to Miss Kellaway and that she was quick to encourage and commend. Perhaps it was her unrelenting attention to detail that killed her shortly afterwards, for she broke under the strain of her work and lived only a little while longer.

Morning assembly is not a bad way to judge the tone of a school and by this yardstick the William White Grammar School would come out with high marks. The magnificent hymn-singing was emotional in a different way from the genuine but perhaps rather lush outpouring of Miss Kellaway's girls. But that was only to be expected where there were boys as well as girls

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and where the singing was directed by a highly competent music master.

William White was a small school with no more than 200 children. It was built, I believe, out of the fortune made by a shipwright, and it was constructed to resemble a ship, in so far as this was compatible with a school's requirements. Intended for dockland boys and girls, it stood on a main thoroughfare not far from the masts and funnels of the Pool of London. But since it had gone up, electric trams, motor lorries, buses and private cars had replaced the horse traffic, and now the din of the streets was hardly pierced by the siren of the steamer. The windows had to be shut if one was to give a lesson without shouting, and when there was no ventilation the atmosphere was heavy and stale with unwashed clothes. The children, almost without exception, came from as poor homes as you might find in those days. Their fathers were in and out of work and had to struggle to get and hold their jobs. Homework, as the headmaster pointed out to me, was usually done at a corner of the living-room table with meals being served in relays at the other end and younger children sometimes crawling about the floor. But tell-tale tea and grease spots on the exercise books had already said as much. They were extraneous additions to the indigenous grime. Dirt crept in from outside through every inch of ventilation, every aperture. It came in overnight when the whole building was barricaded against it and the volume that you had placed on an open bookshelf the evening before had a grey film on it when

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you picked it up again in the morning. The children themselves were tidy to look at and like most East-enders, not the dispirited kind of poor, but energetic, quick-witted and resourceful. This at least was true of the boys. Unlike other co-educational schools that I know of, they were always more in evidence than the girls, who by the upper sixth had disappeared altogether. I remember one little girl who would never say a word. She hung her head while the other boys and girls leapt up and down in their desks, waving their hands in a sort of frenzy to show that they could answer a question. Nevertheless I picked on her. 'Don't ask her, Miss. She never says nothing.' Later when I could get her alone I called her up to my desk and tried to persuade her to talk, but she could only produce little movements of the mouth that came to nothing. There were not enough special schools in those days or she would have been at one.

Since the staff of the William White school were constantly falling ill under the discomforts and difficulties that could not be avoided, it may seem odd to state that this was the most cheerful staff that I had so far met since leaving Saltlands. The very difficulties bound them together, as genuine difficulties will, but there was another reason. Arguments about co-education concentrate on the children and the controversy remains unsettled. But for the staff, it seems to me the advantage is beyond dispute, and this is an indirect advantage for the children—which is an argument not to be overlooked, even though it is not a final one. We

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had separate staff rooms at William White, but there was nothing exclusive about them and when some of the men came into the cabin-like place where the women spent their off-time and made tea before afternoon school, it was impossible to carry on that kind of intense shop talk which is the bane of a women's staff room. Men are doubtless equally tedious in parallel circumstances, but perhaps they bore rather than irritate. It had surprised me that Miss Kellaway's staff had gone in for this sort of talk, making little speeches to no one in particular about the incredible stupidity of the children's written work or inviting us all to try to guess what enormity of ignorance had been displayed by some dunce in class. (You would think we would have got used to realizing the gulf between teacher and taught.) Naturally we talked about the children at William White when the men were with us, but in a relaxed manner and not all the time. It seemed to me that the mixing of sexes, regardless of what the men were like—or the women—was good in itself. Staff meetings which I have always found wearisome functions everywhere else (except at Saltlands, where they were *ad hoc*, short, and electrified by Miss Radice's highly charged personality) were memorable here for the tea and plum cake which preceded them and the easy and rapid disposal of business under a sensible headmaster and a staff not given to fuss over trifles.

From the William White school to Tooton Park High School was a change from industrial London to

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the western suburban ring. At Tooton Park one could see the sun without an intervening haze of dust particles. The school could be kept clean and it was kept scrupulously so. The whiff of furniture polish that met you inside the door was very strong. It reminded you of other nice clean suburban schools and you knew at once that there would be a light, airy, assembly hall with rib-stalls round two sides and a couple of ropes dangling from the rafters. There would be flowers in every classroom, tended by the flower monitress for the week. Every morning the children would stream in at the wide door, set in red brick and imitation stone, satchels in one hand and tennis racquets in the other. Everything would be hygienic, healthy and well organized. All this I knew as the day before term I sat in a semi-circle of schoolmistresses awaiting the arrival of the Head for a staff meeting.

In my interview with Miss Bagstock I had rather taken to her. Unlike most other headmistresses whom I had known she had a bold, vigorous personality. She had a way of clapping you heartily on the shoulder and saying that you looked as if you could do with a good glass of port. I thought perhaps she would ask me round to her private house for a drink to help me recover some of the vitality which had ebbed away in the East End. Stimulating was my private adjective for her.

The staff, surprisingly enough, did not look stimulated. Even when Miss Bagstock came in with an air of jollity they showed no more than a courteous response. We stood up. We resumed our seats. Behind Miss Bag-

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stock, across the whole length of a wall were a series of cardboard sheets on which the complete school timetable was written in exquisite pencil script. The planning, I had learned, was Miss Bagstock's, the execution was Miss Pym's. Miss Pym was a slight, demurely dressed figure to my right—but neat, like her writing.

The meeting was mostly a pep talk about the inspection which was to take place later in the term. The staff looked either blank or mildly eager. At the end, when we began to consider less momentous matters, Miss Pym, in her quiet cultivated voice, said she had found one detail in the time-table which would not work: it meant that a mistress would have to be in two places at once. With astonishing rapidity Miss Bagstock's whole demeanour changed. Her face twisted with anger. 'I thought', she said in a restrained voice which suggested untold violence within, 'I thought that I had asked to be told *at once* if there was anything wrong!' We had already risen from our seats to disperse but remained stock-still. Quivering, Miss Bagstock turned to the time-table, curtly asked for an indiarubber, then erased the mistaken entry as though eliminating a life. Miss Pym stood by without saying anything at all, her face impassive. Miss Bagstock went from the room and the staff went about their business. No one made any reference to the embarrassing incident.

After this I was prepared for anything from Miss Bagstock, but never prepared enough. Next day, at prayers, for instance, when the devotions of five hundred girls had been spoken on their behalf as though

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they were part of an elocution lesson, the school was told to sit on the floor. Abandoning elocution for fireside ease, Miss Bagstock chatted about this and that and especially about the inspection. We heard stories of other inspections and laughed politely when these were humorous. We had just finished one of these little laughs when Miss Bagstock suddenly leaned over a girl in the front row and said: 'Have you got toothache?' There was a whispered 'No'. 'Then don't suck your finger', said the Head, and we laughed again.

During the next few days I constantly passed Miss Bagstock in the passages. Sometimes she would greet me with hilarity, sometimes look through me and say nothing. One day I went to ask if IIIA could have another reading book besides the romances of William Morris and she agreed without making anything of the request. This emboldened me to go to her about IVB.

Everyone knew IVB to be the most difficult form in the school. The peevishness of IIIA was nothing to their vocal discontent. They were always out of the desk when one entered the room and sometimes it seemed they would be out of the window. One day when I was teaching a small sixth-form group in the garden, I saw eight or nine of IVB hanging over the window-sill with only their legs in the room. I sent one of my class, a doughty prefect, to keep them in some sort of order until their teacher, whom I supposed to have been delayed, should arrive. She was back again in a moment and explained with delicate embarrassment that IVB were having a lesson with Miss Lessaways.



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We all knew that Miss Lessaways, a quiet and competent scholar, could not keep order.

My own struggle with IVB was not helped by my having to teach them Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. This ill-chosen book prejudiced them against anything that was called literature. In my four English lessons a week I had nothing else for the form except a grammar book. I thought I could make better headway with a poet whose language was strange if I gave up one lesson to some simple twentieth-century verse, and as there was a limit to the grammar and composition that these children could take in at a time, I thought that civics in the fourth lesson might jolly them along—a bribe to encourage them to tackle the analysis which they hated. They were always grateful for anything one could think of to lighten a burden of work that was really beyond them.

When I put my case to Miss Bagstock she stiffened with contempt. 'My dear lady,' she said, 'we cannot waste our time with citizen courses and frills of that kind *here*. What these children need to know in that way will arise in their Hanoverian history. As for modern poetry, I regard that as only suitable to play with at the end of term, after the examinations. You are making a mistake. What these children want is not to be interested but instructed.' She suggested that I see if there were enough copies of *Kenilworth* in the school and if so make that a second literature book.

After this Miss Bagstock treated me to no more jocularity. I was for ever in trouble. The inspection came

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and a girl was sick while an inspector visited my class. The examinations came and I had, it seemed, worded my questions unsuitably. Painfully Miss Bagstock asked me why I could not manage Mary Stubbs, of whom I had no complaints, but who had been reported by another member of the staff. Like some of my colleagues who had suffered in a similar fashion, I began to dislike teaching, for when there is neither authority to rely on nor freedom to go your own way, the sparkle disappears. All I could do was to offer my resignation before the end of term, and this I did with almost as much emotion as Miss Bagstock herself had displayed. It brought about a sort of truce between us, and I became one of the disillusioned rather than the embittered for the last three weeks. The whole staff had become one or the other.

Looking back on this experience from the vantage point of maturer years, I think it was a mistake that we all took Miss Bagstock so seriously. Fundamentally, I believe she was a likeable and interesting woman. She was probably rather friendless and would have liked to have kept up her jollity and abandoned her rages; but a headmistress, like royalty, has to act alone. Or so we thought then. In my next school I saw that there are false relationships in some schools and that they are quite unnecessary.

Miss Bagstock retired soon after my term under her. It so happens that her successor has made the school remarkable for its attention to everything relating to citizenship.

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## SCHOOL LIFE (II)

One day a little before I began my term at Tooton Park, I received particulars of a permanent post for the autumn that seemed unsuitable in every way but one. The vacancy was for a second mistress, a position that I had eventually held at Saltlands and wished to rise to again. On the other hand the school was far from my home, the subjects required were only partly mine, and the way the place was organized sounded uncomfortably unorthodox. I was going to throw the papers away when caution stayed my hand and instead I wrote a letter of application.

By this time I was bent on getting myself a permanent job, preferably in some good school that everybody had heard of. But some sobering experiences had taught me not to let any reasonable chance go by. A minor headship, offered by a local authority—which I had turned down because my lack of professional training disqualified me from a proper salary—gave me a wrong

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idea about my prospects. No other authority or principal was at all impressed by my private school experience, and against that supply work in other schools hardly counted. It must have been about this time, for instance, that I had sat with half a dozen other candidates in one of London's famous day schools. We awaited our interview. A girl secretary, very young, came in: 'Miss Addison says will you all take your hats off please.' We followed her to the children's cloakroom where there were a few empty pegs in a dark corner. One of us said: 'Could we have a mirror, please?' This put the secretary in a fluster, but she found us what we needed and led us back to the waiting-room. Then the first candidate was called, to be followed by a second in ten minutes. After another ten minutes the secretary came back to say: 'Miss Addison is sorry, but no one who has not had public-school experience need apply.' As I went out I wondered why this condition had not been stated in the advertisement.

Teachers were a plentiful commodity at this time and, like the equally plentiful joints of meat, must be picked over. One director of education, I remember, made rather a boast of getting the would-be teacher in front of him and then asking her to take her hat off. It is true that one does not teach in a hat, but neither does one, if the hat is the kind that is pinned on (as ours were then) take it off without some adjustment to the hair. We all suffered, one way or another from this request, some of us because we could afford a new hat when we could not run to a new suit, and a few others

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because the hat was an integral part of a carefully calculated effect.

Shrewd people who are also courteous can form their judgments of candidates without overt inspection, and at this the principal of Wyngates excelled when, rather to my surprise, I found myself summoned by her for an interview. I had never felt less the object of scrutiny than now when I talked to Miss Gerard across the hearth of her friend's drawing-room instead of being interrogated over a desk or table. If it was a committee that interviewed you the intervening piece of furniture was a table and the distance between you and your interlocutors seemed extended by their surprising questions. Most of the questions had been answered already in the forms of application which lay before the interviewers—unread, alas, or else forgotten. But sometimes a quite irrelevant enquiry would be shot at the candidate, as for example when *à propos* of a senior English post, a woman member of the committee asked if I could teach needlework.

What struck me particularly about Miss Gerard was what I can only call her open-air appearance. I could imagine her in a garden or picnicking on a hillside, but I could not place her in a headmistress's study with Michael Angelos on the walls and signed studio photographs on the mantelpiece. She spoke about Wyngates unemotionally and as if measuring her words, and I began to be interested in the school although it was another private one, and quite small.

The interview was inconclusive, for I still had to see

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the other partner. The appointment, Miss Gerard said, would not be settled in a hurry, but so many weeks passed before I heard from her again that I had begun to doubt that I was still in the running. On the second occasion I went to the school itself, some large non-descript houses—as they seemed to me—in the residential part of a famous university town. The senior principal was a university lecturer whom I knew by repute and I expected to be intimidated.

In the event I was both alarmed and reassured. It was alarming, in a sense, to see the William Morris wallpaper, the Victorian furniture, and the way Miss Lyons piled her hair on her head with a comb near the top. It was reassuring, on the other hand, to be told that if I was interested in citizenship I really ought to read the book that Miss Lyons was taking with her senior girls on Sunday nights. It was a book that I had written myself.

Miss Lyons was full of contrasts. Although she relentlessly maintained a social outlook suited to a well-connected parson's daughter of the last century, there was no modern cause for the betterment of mankind that did not get her support. Little piles of pamphlets lying neatly on a Victorian couch testified to the manner in which she was helping to preserve peace, rebuild old houses, rehabilitate the aged, encourage right posture and save rural England. New editions of the pamphlets would appear as months went by and they were read and annotated before they replaced their forerunners. What Miss Lyons did she did tirelessly and

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all the time, beginning early in the morning and driving herself relentlessly through the day with thirty letters written in the intervals of teaching and lecturing and private conversations. When you first met her she might seem to be wholly academic and serious, but suddenly a shaft of mockery would illuminate the precision of her grave remarks, to be followed by another and another, until solemnity was punctured utterly and Miss Lyons herself was shaking with silent laughter. She would laugh at herself as much as others, and her irony harmed no one. Behind her composed demeanour there were deep affections as well as unsuspected frailties, and although she collected and wore the most abominable hats, bought because they were bargains, she liked to see other women well-dressed. She also greatly admired any skilfully made-up face, insisting that it must be the owner's natural complexion. All this I was to learn later but it is convenient to introduce Miss Lyons fully at this point. Something of the other principal will, I hope, emerge later.

I accepted the job at Wyngates with misgivings. 'Have you got a post for next term?' Miss Bagstock had asked me in one of her jolly moods as we passed in the corridor. 'Yes, Miss Bagstock. I am going to Wyngates.' 'Wyngates? Oh, we used to think that a very odd school.' I went on my way depressed.

Reservations, which I could not explain to myself, hung about me after my arrival, despite the kindly reception that I had from the maids—who were the only people in residence. One can often judge some-

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thing of an establishment from the maids, and the two I met were gay.

Two days later came the first staff meeting. Miss Lyons and Miss Gerard sat at the head of a table and nine or ten women, of varying ages, round it. We discussed the usual things, including new girls and letters from parents. It was all familiar except that the proceedings were conducted as in a small committee. I liked the way the staff were quite unabashed before our two distinguished employers, but was this as it should be, I asked myself? At Tooten Park and indeed in all the other schools where I had recently taught, we had never addressed the headmistress without mentioning her name. ('Yes, Miss Bagstock' . . . 'I'm sorry, Miss Bagstock' . . . 'Do you think, Miss Bagstock, we ought perhaps to . . .') While I was thinking about this there was an interruption. The door opened and in bustled Madame Charbonnière, the French mistress, who lived up the road, pouring out apologies in two languages. She had been obliged, she said, to wait for the laundry man and he had never been so late. Poor Madame Charbonnière, she looked so good-natured as well as so well-groomed; I hated to think that she must now submit to one of those tart reprimands that only headmistresses know how to deliver. But my sympathy was unnecessary. Both principals smiled their greetings and Miss Gerard, without a trace of annoyance, recapitulated such business as had already been disposed of. We then continued.

A tray of jugs, cups and saucers came in as we



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finished, and when everyone was sipping coffee and talking of this and that, I realized that the meeting had, in its own way, been most businesslike and that it had even had a certain formality. For example, the principals were now addressing some younger members of the staff by their Christian names, whereas no one had been referred to in that way at the meeting.

In the next few days I began to delight in the school, but I kept telling myself it was not a 'proper' school. The children who arrived with the usual bumping of trunks had the same easy relationship with the staff as the staff with the principals. The matron introduced me to some whom we met in the passages or on the stairways, and although there might be a flicker of interest in the eyes of the older girls, the youngest approached me like well-brought-up children whom a mother calls from their games to meet one of her friends. Courtesies over, they bounded off. I felt rather lost and wondered how I would find my footing in a school where the deputy to the principals had so little prestige to help her. On the other hand I was pleased to find that the children did not flatten themselves against the wall every time their paths crossed mine.

I continued to swing between doubt and pleasure. At prayers the school seemed too small, yet there was more volume from their ninety voices than from the three hundred at Tooton Park. At a house meeting of the boarders I was delighted at the confident and yet decorous way in which children of all ages crowded into my bed-sitting-room and seated themselves on, under

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or behind the furniture, without giggling, while I read over the house-rules. But the rules were curiously expressed. For example: 'A quarter of an hour is enough for a bath', and 'Cubicle rails are not for swinging on.'

Then there was the system of limited self-government (or co-operative government as we sometimes more appropriately called it) of which I had heard much at my interviews. On the first morning after prayers I went to my own form, there to be told that we must now have a short meeting to elect our representative to the school council. Although I was ex-officio form secretary, I was invited to sit back and watch on this first occasion, and this I gladly did. Last term's representative took the chair and the election proceeded by the usual adult process of nominations and secret ballot in the most matter-of-fact manner. Although at future meetings I would have one vote like the rest of the form, my only function this time was to carry two handfuls of ballot papers to the principals' office. Other form-mistresses were arriving every few minutes, and we each counted our votes under the eyes of C.G. as was the custom. A bell rang, the school crowded into the largest room and C.G., as chairman of the council, read out the list of new members.

Did this council really work, I wondered. In many schools so-called self-government was a bogus affair. How could it be otherwise when the very expression was a contradiction in terms? But there was not time to think further, for lessons were now beginning and I

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went off to my first English class. Although Wyngates had its own methods of school organization and discipline, it had no fads about teaching methods and as I entered the classroom I felt that I was at last on familiar ground. But this too was strange, although this time it was the formality, instead of the reverse which jolted me. On my face was my usual encouraging smile, on the tip of my tongue the phrases of cheerful cajolery with which I was used now to getting over the opening moments in a lower fifth when books could not be found, pencil-boxes slipped from desks and private conversations were wound up with frowns, nods and headshakes. I needed none of it. Everybody was ready and apparently eager to be taught. I was almost disconcerted at having to start work at once.

This moment, which stands out vividly in my memory, was, I suppose, a turning point. My instinctive protests now began to subside although it was a long time before I could look back and see them for what they were—reflex actions produced by two years in orthodox schools. Although I had felt so hostile to Miss Bagstock I had unconsciously accepted her point of view—which, after all, was not an unusual one: the only kind of school which counted was the public school or the high school (as the grammar school was then called). Private schools, always deplorable, were more so if they took an unusual line. I had lost the courage of my convictions and like the early vegetarians I was even afraid of new forms and nomenclature.

In this state of mind I was as much irritated by the

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use of the word 'citizens' to designate a section of the school as I was curious about the significance of the term.

It was not, as I had thought at first, just another name for prefects. A girl could become a citizen when still relatively young—perhaps at 15—but on the other hand she might not be ready until a year or more later. How could she be 'ready'? I asked. I was told it was a question of development; it depended on her powers of judgment and whether she could be relied on to be responsible for other people as well as herself. Yes, they said, there were privileges, of course. Citizens could go out on their own and take one or two of the younger ones with them, and they had full voting rights—but it was a matter of status, more than privilege. Everyone aspired to reach it before she left school. But it was not lightly awarded—as I realized a few weeks later when one of the youngest girls in my own form came up for discussion at a meeting of the council. I will use the occasion to give some idea as to how the council functioned.

We assembled as usual in the library, immediately after our weekly form-meetings. Along one side of the room sat the staff with the principals at the end; along the other sat the form representatives with the two head girls (there were always two) facing the principals. Miss Gerard—or C.G. as we called her—presided.

Business opened with each representative—beginning at the lowest form—reading the minutes of the meeting which had just been concluded. First came a

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report of minor shortcomings, returned lessons and such like, and then a statement of any complaints received or made, suggestions or requests. ('We had a note from the Remove asking us to put back their desks when we borrow their room on Saturdays.' Or, 'We should like to ask if the rules for borrowing library books could be revised as we can never get the books we want.') After these had been read, and discussed, if need be, the child withdrew, unless as happened higher up the school, she was a citizen. Then she remained.

At the conclusion of the minutes of my form, the representative said: 'We wish to propose that Madeleine is made a citizen.'

'Does she wish to be present?' asked the chairman.

'Yes.'

'Then will you fetch her?'

Poor Madeleine, gawky and bespectacled, had been hovering outside and was soon fetched. She was asked to sit down and placed herself on the edge of an empty chair. We then discussed her faults and virtues in much the same way as they had been discussed twenty minutes ago in her form meeting. This, however, was more of an ordeal since older girls and all the staff were summing her up, not to speak of Miss Lyons, who sat by C.G. with her eyes shut behind her glasses, yet by no means asleep. Was Madeleine both self-responsible and capable of taking younger children out into the town? What had she been like as head of a bedroom? Had she been a good house-mother? Was her manner less gauche than last term? Had she grown up somewhat in

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the holidays? Or was she still inclined to be so pre-occupied with her own affairs that she would not notice if a junior went beyond the boundary mark on the copper beech and was perching on a tenuous branch? Such obviously were the questions in the councillors' minds as one or another uttered an opinion, sometimes decisively, sometimes tentatively. The girls spoke quite as much as the staff, friends were quite objective, and my form representative, when called upon, summed up without embarrassment what had been said in our form meeting. Madeleine listened demurely, answering an occasional question; she left before we voted. Opinions were divided, but the division was by no means between staff and girls. By a sufficient majority it was decided to bring the proposal before a school meeting. This was the final stage to come later.

This council meeting approached its end, as others had done, with one of the head girls reading from the slips of paper lying in a little pile before her. These were reports on the youngest children by their house-mothers—older girls who sat by them at meals and generally helped them along. They were short but explicit. ('Prunella Dash has at last found a way of making her bed which prevents it falling to pieces at night. Occasionally she has had to get out of bed to re-make it, and has disturbed others in the bedroom. At table she rebukes me when I insist that she takes a little greens, and always points out that some other house children are not made to take any.')

The reports were not discussed except where some-

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one had a suggestion to make. But while these juniors were in our minds, the same children were enjoying an extended break in the garden, along with all the other non-councillors. There was a good deal of shouting going on now, as Miss Lyons coldly pointed out. It was part of the Wyngates tradition, she said, that our next-door neighbours should not be subjected to inordinate noise. One of the staff opened a window and called down to the nearest child and presently the noise diminished abruptly. Our council business, however, was over except for settling a convenient time for the school meeting, and in a few minutes lessons were resumed.

On the appointed day a bell summoned everyone from Madeleine's form and above to the assembly hall. All her peers and superiors now had a right to speak for or against her elevation, and again she listened to an examination of her character—or, more accurately, of that side of it which concerned other people. After a short discussion a vote was taken by a show of hands, but with the voters faithfully shutting their eyes so as not to be influenced. As I counted the upraised hands I noticed that the voting, as before, did not go by age, but was rather between the optimists and the cautious minds.

This was my first 'school meeting' but only the appropriate part of the school was present. Later in the term we had a meeting of the whole school to discuss a new service book for morning assembly. But the meeting I particularly remember was one in the following year called to discuss a middle school infatuation for film

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magazines. Some of the staff wanted to forbid them, so did most of the older girls, but the middle forms doggedly defended their right, as they saw it, to read what they pleased in their free time. After prolonged discussion the meeting had to be adjourned without a decision. But the magazines disappeared before a further meeting was called.

After I had seen co-operative government as a going concern, the Wyngates Constitution—which was read aloud once a term—took on a different aspect. I had originally thought of it as a paper plan; I now realized that it was the result of experience, thought and experiment, something to be altered when necessary or abandoned if it become meaningless.\* I became interested also in the story behind it.

Wyngates had been founded in 1897, long before most schools of an unconventional type. It had not begun as a school at all, but as an escape from one. Its founder was senior mistress in a Victorian seminary where everyone, including the senior mistress herself, was hedged about with regulations. This quiet and gifted lady, a natural teacher and an historian, who had to ask permission to go as far as the post office, shook off her chains and set up house with the then young Miss Lyons, the most brilliant of her former pupils. Here the daughters of university lecturers and others gathered round the dining-room table for special classes. The

\* The constitution in its latest revised form is given in Appendix II.



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classes grew, it was desirable to add new subjects, it became necessary to find larger premises, and larger ones again, and so from the dining-room table a school had to emerge.

After the first war when there was an influx of both boarders and day girls, Miss Gerard, a young geographer with high academic honours, became a visiting teacher. Her incisive intellect and personal qualities impressed Miss Lyons, who persuaded her to become a partner, the third as it were in the order of succession. Miss Gerard, who had been educated, as she often said, in marble halls, meaning one of the best-known schools for England's well-brought-up girls, at first thought Wyngates a light diversion, then saw the germ in the wheat and finally settled to some years of being what she had never aspired to be, a headmistress.

There was something in the small school, she thought, that was worth preserving, but could it be preserved when the school grew from thirty to ninety? It was her job, as the most active of the partners—the founder was near retirement and Miss Lyons was lecturing in two universities—to find out. Some organization was necessary and she began by appointing prefects. (She herself had once been a prefect, policing the marble corridors and perhaps getting a little puffed-up in the exercise of power.) But almost at once she saw that prefects were inappropriate to Wyngates and by general agreement they were abolished.

About this time she went to a lecture on the Greek City State, perhaps out of interest, perhaps to accom-

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pany a friend—it was mere chance. Coming home she thought how suitable was this form of democracy, no longer applicable to our vast populations, to a school, and especially a small school. From that moment she began to work out a new system of school government, discussing it with staff and girls and proceeding by trial and error. It was a system that gave every child a chance to participate; to propose, criticize and sometimes to decide, according to the level of her development, with reserved powers for the staff.

I soon found that I had to meet criticisms of my new school from one or two friends in grammar schools. When I talked about form, council and school meetings they were kind enough, whatever they thought, not to say that these seemed a waste of time; but how, they asked, could so much time be spared? I could not answer this there and then; I am not sure that I can answer it now. It was true that apart from the occasional school meeting, which took place in the morning break and might claim a slice out of the succeeding lesson period, we regularly spent an hour a week on self-administration. It was true also that none of the staff resented this, and certainly not I myself, who had been wont to grumble at a royal wedding because it upset my English syllabus. My critics naturally assumed that Wyngates was one of those private schools where work is not taken seriously and examinations do not matter. It needed Miss Lyons to answer them with one of her incisive sentences.

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The school undoubtedly maintained its initial regard for learning, and its annual examination results, including places and scholarships at the university, might have been the envy of other schools that strove for these achievements with more anxiety and less success. Not that Wyngates' girls did not, like others, get bothered about their prospects, and work early and late, with the usual sighs and groans, as examinations approached; but it was a tradition that examination candidates were not exempt from ordinary school activities—as I discovered in my first term when, amid general horror, I proposed to cast the school play without them.

I suspect, although there is no means of proving it, that the hours spent on school government and discipline were really a saving of time in the end. They were the outward form that maintained a habitual vigilance over children's general behaviour and happiness and a symbol of easy relationship between old and young. There was less time wasted than usual in secret miseries, cherished resentment and blind hostility, and since there was a sensitive link between teachers and taught, girls who might elsewhere have fooled time away could be brought back to their work with a mere inflexion of the teacher's voice.

I remember a sixth-form girl knocking on the door of one of the staff's private rooms and, after politely asking if she was busy, saying: 'Can I come and talk for a bit? I have nothing to say in particular, but I just felt that I'd like to talk to a grown-up this evening.' When it was as easy as that, difficulties, if they arose, could be

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smoothed out. The younger ones were even readier to call on the staff and came either with complaints or what they thought were good ideas before they sent them through the appropriate channels. Sometimes, too, they came because their capacity for self-entertainment had run out, and like so many children in so many homes they could not, for the moment, think what to do. On the other hand their initiative, unimpeded by many prohibitions, could take startling forms, as when the matron entering a bathroom found one small child applying a packet of butter from the larder to an inflamed patch on the flesh of another. 'She sat by mistake under the hot tap,' was the explanation.

Not the least important feature of the whole system to my mind was the housemother-housechild arrangement. This, of course, is not peculiar to Wyngates, but is to be found in other girls' boarding-schools. Small children, for all the benevolent treatment I have given them in this book, can be very objectionable at times—spiteful, sulky or bullying. The housemothers restrained the self-assertive and guarded the weaklings. They sometimes perceived what the staff had overlooked. 'I wonder if Margaret is a little deaf,' observed one girl of sixteen in her weekly housemother's report on a new girl of eleven. As it turned out this was the explanation of what we all had taken for dullness. Checked in time the girl was saved from loss of hearing.

It is often said that citizen training begins in the home and that having learned to live in that small com-

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munity the child is ready to learn to live in a school, and that the school in its turn prepares for the wider world. It is a curious formula which I shall take up in the final chapter. Whether true or not for boys the process on which it is based is not the same for girls, most of whom come back to a home not long after they have gone into the world. They then live a double life, unless they submerge themselves so entirely in domesticity that they take no account of anything outside it. At Wyngates for the first time I saw how a school in itself, and apart from direct instruction, can encourage in a girl qualities which will serve her well both in the home and the wider world. This could not have been done if the school itself had not been organized like an enlarged home and if the principal, who had devised its organization and kept it on the level, had not in herself the qualities which give a child security and the staff strength. No less than Miss Lyons she also had a rippling latent humour and I dare say it was a good tonic to the children to find that far from being taken very seriously they were often laughed at, albeit affectionately. This I imagine is a subsidiary reason why so many of them have made happy marriages.

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I have already implied that, as far as lessons went. Wyngates was a fairly conventional school. It was not very surprising therefore that no such subject as civics had hitherto appeared in the curriculum. Indeed the school's only noticeable concern with the outside world was represented by a silver goblet, known as the Kentucky Cup. This had been given to the school by the American mother of a former pupil with instructions that it should be awarded every year to the girl who had done most to promote good international relations.

Americans have their own ideas about these things but to the Wyngates staff the trophy was an annual embarrassment. One year, on the principle that one must be informed before one can be useful, we instituted a general knowledge competition on world affairs. We felt that it would be the donor's wish that no

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child should be precluded from entering on account of age and some quite young children who might be described as having done no more than their first steps in civics chose to present themselves. Some of their cheerful guesses gave us as much pleasure as the remarkably good answers of their seniors.

I give a few examples:

Question: What is meant by collective security?

Answer: All armed to the teeth.

Question: What is an embargo?

Answer: A step into the unknown.

Question: Explain proletariat.

Answer: This might be something to do with war.  
(Latin for battle is proelia.)

Our Kentucky Cup test was only an improvement on the ordinary general knowledge examination in that it required concentration for perhaps three-quarters of an hour on one single category of general knowledge. Afterwards with the comparing of answers among the candidates some mental gaps would be filled, and I do not doubt that I zealously sought out the authors of the worst inaccuracies and put them right. But a general knowledge test has not much to do with education. Like anything that happens just once in a way and is unrelated to anything before or after it, it is a diversion and perhaps a stimulus, although for those who do badly it may leave a quite unnecessary feeling of incompetence. A hotch-potch of assorted oddities of knowledge has much the same relation to true learning as the tit-bits of a cocktail party to a proper meal, and in

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both cases the appetite may suffer. I once saw a general knowledge paper that had been handed out to some preparatory school boys to work at in the holidays, so that they could answer the questions from memory when they returned to school. It sounded a great improvement on the usual thing until one studied the questions. They were mostly not worth the trouble required. One section, for instance, asked for the interpretation of a set of naval words and phrases. The school had no association with the Navy, but as the small boy who sought my help patiently explained, one of the new masters had just left this service. Without casting any reflection on the Navy it might be said that a welder's or compositor's technical vocabulary would have served as well.

I had my best professional chance at Wyngates, for my principals were pleased to have some political education introduced into the school and I was, in any case, in charge of the time-table. I followed the plan which had worked well at Saltlands: a year's introductory civics course at the age of about 12-13, to be followed by membership of the school House of Commons (transplanted for the first time) until the girl left school. For those who stayed beyond the certificate year there was an advanced course which varied in character. The scheme was modified a little from year to year and it was supplemented by a school society for the study of international affairs.

Free to experiment I made some mistakes. There was an economics paper in our school certificate examina-



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tion which could be taken as an alternative to history. At the history teacher's suggestion I prepared a class for this one year and only afterwards realized how greatly it was to their disadvantage. The syllabus was old-fashioned and based on one of the old theoretical text-books. It would have been, perhaps, a useful start for a girl who was later going to read for an external degree in economics in her spare time, but as part of a general education it had the same sort of value as swinging dumb-bells has towards physical development. The mind, like the body, can be trained in useful as well as useless exercises. I enjoyed it because it was a new thing and perhaps some of the class enjoyed it for the same reason—as well as because the examination ground was so neatly contained between the covers of a slim book. But history was pushed into the background that year, and that meant not only a gap in historical knowledge but a break in the particular kind of education that history can bring and of which the benefits are often only realized later. Economics as prescribed in our syllabus was not one of the liberal arts, but a dead science. (It is only fair to add that economics papers in the General Certificate of Education are not like this.)

This was the period of world unemployment (the 1930's) and for one term I gave to the advanced class and any of the staff who cared to turn up, a series of talks on its causes, using for my information an analysis published in Geneva and regarded throughout the world as the most authoritative pronouncement on this

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sad subject. Every Wednesday I shut myself up after lunch and pored over this volume until five o'clock when my lecture-lesson began. It was not really worth it. The material wanted more digesting than I could give it to make it presentable to girls whose lives were far removed from the frustration and despair of millions. Again it was more of a mental exercise than something that could be usefully assimilated.

Abstractions do not easily slip into a girl's mind, or if they slip they do not stay. Our world picture which swept over thousands of distraught farmers in the name of agriculture, employers in the name of industry and working men and women in the name of employed, under-employed and unemployed, should have been shown my class through a microscope rather than a telescope, intelligent though its members were. A few significant or typical examples might have opened their minds and touched their sympathies at the same time. From the particular we could then have approached the general.

I thought that what was wrong was my inadequate knowledge of economics, but if a small girl in my junior civics class was right the need was not for an expert but for expertise. I had about this time expanded the civics syllabus to teach the younger children something about money. This went quite well until I tried to explain how a bill of exchange is used. I made the children draw up mock bills and then try to sell them to one another as if they were business men of different nationalities. There came a moment of confusion when

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I told them that I wished I were an economist. They all looked at me kindly and a gentle voice from the back said, 'But then you wouldn't know how to teach us.'

Perhaps one of the more useful excursions into economics, although it only took us to the doorstep of the subject, was one that came at the end of the world economic survey instead of the beginning, where it belonged. Members of the class found out the current prices of various things which would have to be included in an ordinary family budget and three of them went by appointment to see the manager of the local employment exchange to learn from him what the so-called 'dole' amounted to for unemployed men and women. The two sides of the family account had then to be matched in class and by no means could this be done. It left—momentarily—at least a healthy regard for the unemployed man's wife. The manager, willing enough to do anything to help the outside world understand the unemployment situation, was a little disconcerted by his visitors, partly because despite our preliminary telephone conversation he could not conceive that anyone but members of a school staff would present themselves, but also, perhaps, because the information that they sought could have been sent by post. From a teacher's point of view, of course, there was all the difference in the world between opening an official envelope and crossing the threshold of a building that stood in a street behind the whirl of town and university life, and which would only have been

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observed by the chance passer-by because of the queue on the pavement. It was a place that had no meaning for half the population and meant well or woe to the rest.

But this kind of personal investigation, for those who care to think about it, stirs up a flurry of difficulties. There is first the indelicacy of encroaching on other people's misfortune. I do not remember the details of this expedition but I have misgivings in retrospect lest the three well-fed young women may have by-passed a weary queue, entering by the same door or one in full view. If so they would have raised some resentful speculation and it would have been better if the visit occurred (as it may have done) outside the ordinary exchange hours. On the other hand, if no unemployed men were visible the visit lost something of its educational value.

As a student in the Social Science Department of the London School of Economics, I had once seen destitution at close hand, both in the streets, on the doorsteps and occasionally in a crowded living-room or wretched bedroom, but I had always been working for some recognized body, such as the L.C.C. Care Committee. This was the way we learned during two days of the week about conditions surveyed academically on the other days. We were voluntary workers, not prying but helping, or at least trying to help. Even so we were sometimes regarded with suspicion or impatience. There were so many agencies that had the right to knock on the door of the working-woman's home, although not so many as now. This is a matter to which

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Mrs. D. L. Hobman, in her recent informative book, *The Welfare State*, draws attention. However, this need not deter any boy or girl who is old enough—and looks old enough—to be genuinely useful from offering his or her spare-time help to some philanthropic cause. The old, the sick, and the blind are usually glad to hear the knock on the door, while in play centres and camps, and in the Scout and Guide movements, the less fortunate children can be helped to enjoy themselves without giving offence to anyone.

There is only one other way to learn about other people's lives and that is by living with them for a time. This some people have done, going into a factory, for example, or taking a vacation job in a milk-bar. I give two instances personally known to me, but the opportunities of doing some work outside one's ordinary experiences have widened immeasurably since the last war and upper sixth form girls in well-to-do schools who sometimes take a special citizenship course to round off their education—and fill in the gap before they are old enough to enter society—could, if they would, get much nearer life as it is than is possible on a tour of a model biscuit factory. Now that there are more jobs than people to take them, no one would be deprived of a livelihood if, for instance, a girl became a temporary chambermaid in an hotel in the holiday season. It might be most instructive, if she could stand it, for she would not only learn about the life and outlook of an hotel employee but would see her own class from another person's viewpoint.

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In another way also it is easier now to change one's social rut for a time. What is sometimes described as the levelling process has narrowed the difference between Knightsbridge and the Walworth Road. You are therefore not much more likely to run into infection in the one place than the other; the consumptives' cough and the stale, verminous squalor which were all too familiar in my social science days have largely been banished. This, undoubtedly makes social work nowadays less attractive, for it is not to be gainsaid that 'slumming' had a romantic call between the wars. Along with this diminishing fascination there has developed a widespread assumption that the statutory services now do all that is necessary, leaving no room for voluntary work. This, of course, is as absurd as it is hard on those indefatigable people of an older generation who carry on as before. The public services, from the hospitals to the old age pensioners, provide the practical essentials; everything extra, whether in things to eat or drink, outings or holidays, or time spent in relieving loneliness, the extra human touch in fact, awaits the voluntary worker. It was once the pride of the British upper middle class to assume responsibility for the unfortunate and even if they sometimes carried out their self-appointed duties with hectoring or patronage, theirs was a spirit which might, if it could be recaptured and adapted, permeate, to everyone's advantage, the extensive lower middle class whose *mores* largely dominate our society.

Public affairs extend beyond one's own country of

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course, and what does the boy or girl do who is trying to learn about Brazil, or Indonesia, or any other country which cannot be taken in on a school journey? According to some correspondence in *The Times* in 1953, he or she is likely to write to the country's embassy or legation in London. Not long before these correspondents expressed shocked surprise that school-children should harry diplomatic representatives with requests for plain information, I came upon an instance of the same thing in the offices of the High Commissioner for Ceylon.

'By the way,' said the polite Ceylonese, 'we are constantly getting letters from schoolchildren asking for pamphlets about our country. We cannot think why.' The answer of course was that Ceylon was evidently a popular 'project' of the day. And here, for the benefit of parents and others not versed in this method, I must explain that a school project is a theme which can be studied geographically, historically, as part of current events, and through art and handicraft. Lessons thereby lose their hard and fast divisions and the children's interest is quickened because they are usually called upon to make individual contributions to some general display. Enterprise takes wings and may embarrass the child in the end as well as other people—as happened in the case of a girl who brought cigarettes from home to demonstrate the products of Rhodesia. These were found among her belongings to the dismay of her headmistress who thought her the last child in the school to go in for secret smoking. There is no doubt that once

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children get busy with project work they usually enjoy themselves and you get the sort of activity that I have described at the Allenby Trade School. Like everything else, however, it needs preparation and guidance if it is going to end in the children learning something, and part of the job is to teach them where and how to learn.

Chief among the places where information can be had are the public libraries—as someone pointed out in the correspondence to which I have referred. You cannot get everything from books but it is surprising how much more you can get than you might at first expect. Traveller's tales will put flesh and blood on the bare bones in Whitaker's *Almanac* and autobiographies and novels illuminate historical statements. But the children do not realize this and it is up to the teacher or librarian to help them.

At the time I write of, we either had not discovered what monuments of knowledge librarians are, or else they were not so versatile then as now. There was, nevertheless, one instance in which I bethought myself of the public library for help in a job of work which some of the older girls at Wyngates undertook. It was at the time of the abortive Disarmament Conference, but as yet we did not know how utterly the conference was going to fail. Nothing like it had been staged before and it seemed a good idea to study the national differences which even at the start made progress seem doubtful. Therefore towards the end of one term some seven or eight girls went to the library, whenever they



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could spare the time, to find out from recent issues of *The Times* what were the arguments of the chief powers, each girl identifying herself with one country.

When they came back I helped them sift the information they had collected and made sure they had not misunderstood what they had read. Then, at the end of the term, they sat round a table on the school stage and gave a simplified but dramatic representation of this current controversy. There was a certain levity about it which to my more earnest adult mind was almost shocking, but in the light of history this adolescent mockery was not so wide of the mark. It was better that they should not take too seriously that for which they were not responsible and could not influence. Quite the reverse happened, a year or two later, in the Wyngates House of Commons where the girl who had tried to console me for not being an economist spoke with so much feeling against Mussolini's Abyssinian adventure that her chief friend, who was an Italian, rose to his passionate defence. Although they were both only about fifteen their speeches had an adult ring. But afterwards one of them went away to weep in private.

Full of wisdom after the event, people now deplore the extent to which we taught children about the League of Nations in the years before its demise. It was, of course, part of a national movement. Every town had its branch of the League of Nations Union and hardly a village remained uninformed. Or, at all events, they had the opportunity. Those of us who went about the

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countryside speaking in village halls met strange misconceptions. I remember one village meeting where the chairman thought I was associated with the Navy League, while an old man in the audience assumed I was being given a chance to try out my accomplishments. 'You did very well for a young lady,' he said at the end, with a pat on my shoulder. In the towns, as at the headquarters of the Union, some of the most gifted people of those days were drawn into the movement, but behind them there was a motley crowd that included cranks and sentimentalists as well as a mass of unassuming men and women who were making their humble gesture in favour of a saner world.

Many politicians and business men, along with the professional cynics, did not believe that war could be prevented or international co-operation achieved—except over things like quarantine, lighthouses, and the white slave traffic—but teachers are always on the side of the angels. We taught about the Covenant of the League of Nations as science teachers explained wireless sets, or attempted to explain Einstein, except that we were not impartial. We went too far with our wishful thinking and so added to the shock of disillusionment when war came. As far as I know the United Nations is taught much more realistically and as a phenomenon rather than a crusade—except in America where owing to the country's abstention from the League it has been presented as something unprecedented, like a new comet in the sky.

Much of the propaganda for the League of Nations

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was carried on out of school, at meetings of school societies or in special exhibitions and performances. A favourite enterprise was to present a mock assembly but it was often rather dull for the audience. A more successful venture of this kind was a certain reproduction of a conference of the International Labour Organisation in which boys and girls from all the grammar and similar schools in one city took part. It succeeded because it was prepared for with great thoroughness and carefully rehearsed. It was staged on the floor of a town hall with the audience in the gallery. But as I have pointed out before, you cannot ever be quite sure what children will do and on this occasion a few eager small girls, who were told that they could be 'messengers', distracted attention from some first-rate speeches by the assiduity with which they kept on delivering notes to delegates.

At Wyngates the foreign affairs society used to go in for teatime meetings. It was a plan that could only be carried out in a school where administrative arrangements were not sacrosanct, for it meant that members of the society had their tea at a later time than the rest of the school and were allowed to prolong it by about half an hour. An outside speaker was invited, preferably some young man from the University and often a foreigner. Having shared with his audience the platefuls of thick bread and butter and the sugar buns which were a symbol of the unusual, he would get up in his place and speak for about twenty minutes while the saucers tinkled to second cups. Afterwards his own cup

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was refilled and he answered questions. The young men seemed to enjoy themselves as much as the audience and the time-limit coupled with the informality prevented them from reading us wordy papers.

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## TRAVEL ABROAD

People often speak with biting envy of teachers' long holidays, but even in my day, and in schools where the most favourable conditions prevailed, we found the term, not the holidays, too long.

Without having experienced it, it is difficult to realize how teaching forbids the natural pause and what a difference this makes. When energy has for the moment spent itself you cannot stop for replenishment—not in the classroom. You cannot, for example, ignore the upturned faces while you have a good stretch, light a cigarette or turn your thoughts for three minutes to what you are going to eat for supper. You must go on talking, listening, explaining, encouraging, and you must do this for two or three hours at a time, except for the little breaks between lessons and the rare free period when, as likely as not, you will have to take the place of a colleague who is ill.

At four o'clock comes modified relaxation with a

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meeting of the Music or Current Affairs Club, duty on the hockey field, or rehearsal of the school play. At five you sit down to such corrections as are too bulky to carry away; at half-past six you go back to the lodgings which fit your purse rather than your taste; between then and ten o'clock you prepare for the morrow's lessons. Small sins of omission nag the mind; the child who has been away with measles needs some extra coaching if she is to catch up with her certificate work; that upper sixth lesson which you gave this afternoon would have been better if you had done more reading for it last week-end; for the second time in a month you have declined a fond mother's invitation to tea. After such a day restful sleep does not always come.

The only comparable occupation to a teacher's is that of the mother of a young family. You see her getting worn in the same way, but by the time she is forty the children have long ceased to be a day-to-day and hour-to-hour responsibility, whereas at the same age the teacher has another twenty years to go. I write, of course, of the grammar school teacher in particular, for it is where all the children do homework and teaching ranges from coaching university candidates to leading spirited children *en masse* through the rudiments of a subject that the strain falls hardest. It would be interesting to discover whether the employment, and careful deployment, of a large number of part-time teachers would cost very much more than the present expense of illness and breakdowns. The term would not be too long if the day were shorter.

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It is always astonishing that teachers can find the enterprise to do anything about the children when the term is over, but never more so than in present conditions. Nearly all schools are overcrowded, some are stretched to nearly twice their capacity, with corridors turned to classrooms, and since before the war I never knew a staffroom large enough for its staff, the present hugger-muggery behind those closed doors must be pitiable. Imagine how elbow must impinge on elbow, how the door ceaselessly opens and shuts, and how when some fresh air missionary throws open a window, IVc arithmetic papers and the list of candidates for the General Certificate rise in the breeze and settle conjointly on the floor. And yet there were never so many school journeys as now and there were never so many British school children on the Continent in the holiday seasons. What with exchange schemes and youth clubs adding to the numbers, it is something like a mass exodus.

We were less adventurous before the war as well as less in numbers. A week in Paris was the usual plan and Switzerland was our furthest afield. But, as teachers still do, we often planned journeys or summer schools in our own country, and in the unorthodox schools especially the younger teachers would often think up holiday diversions which they would enjoy themselves as much as the children they invited to join them.

Thus, because my own inclinations went that way at the time, I had already offered to organize a camping holiday for some Wyngates girls, when in the summer of

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1931 I was invited to help with a junior summer school at Geneva. A schoolmistress's conscience is often a little out of joint and I might have declined what I greatly preferred to do in favour of what I thought I was obliged to do if my principal had not suggested that I could well leave the Wyngates girls to amuse themselves. How right she was I quickly discovered when, heavy with apology, I sought out the chief enthusiast for the camping project. With charming honesty she said that, as a matter of fact, she had forgotten all about it.

Thus began a congenial holiday task which was repeated for successive summers until the war came. I had been to Geneva three times before, once as a member of an adult study group and twice with parties I had organized at Saltlands and Wyngates. All these visits had been timed to coincide with the annual assembly of the League of Nations and for myself the most educative feature had been the early morning lectures which Professor Dupont had given on what might be expected to happen during the forthcoming sitting.

I wonder now why I did not try to imitate this kind of prognostication in other contexts, even though I could not emulate the subtlety and precision of thought with which our lecturer, rising on tiptoe and his face lit up with the shifting lights of his own mind, held our attention captive. One might, for instance, before a parliamentary debate on the adjournment, have discussed with a sixth-form class what the chief Opposition spokesman was likely to say, who would reply for



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the Government, what would probably be his defence and why, and what other member might be expected to speak. The class might then be counted on to read the debate in *Hansard* or *The Times* if only to see if one was wrong.

The principle of nourishing interest beforehand is particularly important for school journeys abroad and schoolteachers like myself who could be seen twenty-five years ago stepping briskly along the Quai Mont Blanc amid a cluster of adolescents, had sometimes, I fear, not sufficiently attended to it. The schoolchildren—for they were still that—whom we brought to Geneva were probably more dazzled than informed by our enthusiasm and, if the truth be told, those who came were not necessarily our brightest and best, but the ones who had been able to extract the necessary money from their parents.

It was one of those instances where the teacher deceives herself (I do not remember any schoolmasters) with thinking that what is food for the goose is food for the gosling too. Assembly time in Geneva was a time for adults, and schoolmistresses who were there with their charges could not, if they would, mingle freely with the other camp followers of these first international meetings. In the evenings when the public utterances of the preceding hours were being turned inside out in the *brasseries*, the schoolmistress, having taken her girls to have an ice-cream soda at a café-tea-room, led them back to the hotel and remained there herself to protect their honour and care for their health.

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Melancholy though this sounds, it was better than the tenuous sense of responsibility which, in the present era of mass school travel abroad, makes some teachers try to efface themselves as soon as the Channel boat leaves the English coast.

The summer school to which I was invited took place well before Geneva filled up with statesmen, officials and journalists for the main event of the year. The children who came to it, therefore, could claim the help of knowledgeable men and women who in a few weeks would be too busy to talk to them—and that was part of the idea. The school drew its members from British public schools and secondary schools and its lecturers from Geneva experts. It had begun in a small way with fifty or sixty boys and girls, but eventually it grew to three hundred. Some came in school groups with one or two members of their own staff, but a great many of them came individually, or in twos and threes, without any adult. It was to the girls in this large unescorted group that I was attached, along with a master for the boys.

The arrangements were much the same from year to year. My colleague and I met in London and were briefed about final details before meeting our charges at Victoria Station. There might be sixty to a hundred of them, ranging in ages from fifteen to nineteen. Sometimes we travelled by the night boat from Newhaven and then those who were on the collective passport mustered like somnambulists at Dieppe before day broke to show them France. At other times we went on

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the mid-day steamer, finding it seemingly full already before the whole summer school filed up the gangway with enormous suitcases, bulging rucksacks, and protruding tennis racquets. It seemed to me that the laws of chance must sometime precipitate an accident among so many. But we always reached Geneva without serious mishap and got home again without one.

This was not just good fortune. It was chiefly due to the imaginative planning beforehand—when personal letters to both children and adults not only told them what to do but made them feel members of the school before the school had come into being—and cheerful improvisation as the school got going.

There were not many eventualities that nonplussed Miss Whitworth-Kerr, the master mind behind all but the academic programme of the school. Scarlet fever, devaluation, clandestine rendezvous, lost luggage, lost child, likelihood of war; all these she circumvented with the same experienced ease with which the drivers of our motor coaches took us round the precipices on our all-day excursions to the high mountains. Only twice do I remember her at a loss, and then it was words and not actions that failed.

The first occasion was when she was having a talk with an unprepossessing and seemingly harmless girl of fifteen who had been carrying on a flirtatious telephone conversation with the lift-man.

‘Tell me, Naomi,’ said Miss Whitworth-Kerr, who had heard of these goings-on from the hotel telephonist, ‘do you know any men in Geneva?’

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Naomi, with her pale eyes innocently wide, replied unhesitatingly: 'Oh yes, I know Mr. Phaeton.' Mr. Phaeton was in the sixties and wedded to the League of Nations. Everyone knew him, for when he was not living in Geneva he was touring Britain in the cause of peace. During the summer school he was our constant companion, guide and tutor.

The other was a different incident. Miss Whitworth-Kerr sat in the office of Gobelin Frères, fixing the details for the annual trip to Chamonix. Against a background of posters portraying gentians, edelweiss and snow, M. Gobelin leaned over the counter towards his favourite English client, elaborating the argument for taking a different route this year. The conversation went somewhat as follows:

'But, M. Gobelin, this new route means that we can't break the journey at Cluses as usual?'

M. Gobelin shook his head regretfully.

'Well then?'

M. Gobelin shrugged his shoulders.

'Where else could we stop instead?'

M. Gobelin named another village.

'But M. Gobelin. There is only one café there suitable for the girls. One hundred and twenty girls. If I may say so, we should be held up for three-quarters of an hour—even assuming the plumbing would stand it.'

M. Gobelin reflected, shrugged his shoulders, beamed and said:

'Alors. Il faut faire une construction.'

The disposition of suitable *toilettes* in and around

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Geneva was a matter in which Miss Whitworth-Kerr was rightly an expert, for a summer school depends as much on mundane matters like this as on the excellence of the lectures. I remember that one year she discovered that a partition put up in the Disarmament building to house a Chinese exhibition, barred us from a whole set of these amenities. Now in Chinese territory, they could not be counted on before we set off for an afternoon on the Salève. It was after midday and the janitor whom we hoped to bribe had gone off for two hours, as they do in Geneva. The boys and girls were listening to the last words of a lecturer in the Palais Wilson next door. There was perhaps a quarter of an hour to find alternative accommodation. Delay was serious for a special string of trams would presently come clanging and ringing along the rue des Paquis to fetch the crowd away. In the company of the headmistress of a famous girls' school I set off to beg the co-operation of neighbouring pensions. Had her governors seen my distinguished companion, rushing back and forth across the sun-baked streets, her draperies flying, her massive pile of hair tottering from its pins, her cheeks red, but her eyes glinting with achievement, they would have wondered.

While a new set of children came to the summer school each year, some of the staff remained constant. There were quite a lot of us. Apart from the schoolmasters and schoolmistresses (mostly the latter) who came with their own school parties, there were other people, like myself, who were taken on to help in some

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capacity or other. I am bound to admit that the remarkably cheerful atmosphere that pervaded the whole company, while partly deriving from a mixed staff, seemed to me chiefly to depend on our having as our leaders—Miss Whitworth-Kerr and her colleague (a man) who organized the lecture programme—two people who were outside the school world entirely. No teacher, whether head of a school or assistant, could in any case have found time and energy for so thorough a piece of organization. But practical considerations apart, if a summer school of such dimensions had been conducted in what appeared to be a so free and easy a way by a member of the profession, some of the teachers present would have demurred about the absence of rules, the taking of risks and treating irresponsible children as if they were nearly responsible adults. As it was we never questioned the wisdom of our leaders, and even headmasters of famous public schools, who were invited to be the titular heads of the school in turn, were content to let the office be a sinecure.

Only over one particular did the teachers year by year raise objections. This was the number of lectures that were crammed into the ten days. And yet, most of us, if we had had to draw up the programme, would have probably slipped into the same error. It was the familiar case of zeal destroying its purpose.

The school, as we saw it, was an opportunity to introduce a mass of young people, at what is regarded as their most impressionable age, to the machinery of international co-operation, the causes of current inter-

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national disputes and the hopes of mankind for their ultimate resolution. Within this general opportunity there were several subsidiary ones. The assembly of the nations would be more real to the children if they sat in the seats of the delegates and heard someone like Mr. Phaeton describe what happened last year. On the same principle they must see the council chamber, the more sombre premises of the International Labour Organisation and—when it was built—the long corridors of the Palais des Nations. There were other expeditions also, not directly connected with the matter in hand, for it was unthinkable that the children should come away from Geneva without learning something of the city itself.

So there was much perambulatory lecturing as well as the more formal kind, and in the formal lectures there were, once again, opportunities that it seemed wrong to overlook. Professor A. for example was in Geneva. He was such an authority on international politics that we must let the children hear him at all costs; while Monsieur B., if he could be persuaded to address them on any subject of his own choosing, would be someone to remember all their lives. These were over and above Mr. C., who always addressed the summer school on world health, and Mrs. D., who was an authority on the international control of dangerous drugs, and young Mr. E., who though rather a dull speaker, knew more than anyone else about international labour legislation. None of the last three subjects could be omitted if the picture to be presented was

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a balanced one, showing where co-operation was succeeding as well as where it was failing. Similarly the political mechanism had to be explained by other exponents.

Thus the intervals between the educational expeditions, the occasional pleasure outings and daily recreation were packed with more information than the children could take in. Not that they resisted. A few, immune to the strong morale of the school, might go for a swim in the lake instead of sitting on the grass at the feet of Mr. E., who was talking at some length about international labour conventions, or, greatly daring, slip off to a café on the evening when Professor A. was to elucidate the tensions between France and Germany. But they were very few, and the rest sat through the outdoor sunshine or indoor swelter with sagging attention.

For some the discussion groups were more interesting than the lectures. Each boy and girl was in one of these and the group had to produce a set of collective decisions on the subject allotted to it. This might be something quite outside the proper province of a school-boy or schoolgirl but they produced clever corporate 'reports' and we all applauded when these were read aloud on the final day. Now I hope we would know better than to set too much store by young opinions.

There is an old and unconvincing adage which says that one should rise from a meal feeling that one could have eaten some more. This applies much more aptly to feasts of the mind and had we been restrained



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enough to give our junior school less they might have helped themselves to more. But that would have meant better quality as well as less in quantity. Our lecturers were distinguished people, but some of them did not know how to address adolescents. It is not an aptitude with which every speaker is blessed, but apparently only the B.B.C. has the courage to put those who need it through their paces. We might also have done something to whet the appetite. We might have taken fewer children, accepting only those who proved themselves already partly informed. We might have set them to collect information instead of encouraging them to form opinions, giving them silent hours with books and pamphlets and with tutors to help.

I do not see why a junior summer school need abandon all proven school methods and ape adult ones. The clever sixth-formers can rise to adult level—superficially, anyhow—and it is their smart questions which delight the speaker, flatter the fond organizer and divert attention from all those blank eyes which betray a faltering comprehension or escape into daydream.

If I write critically of this Geneva school it is only because I am confining myself to what I know. It was, I think, the largest pre-war enterprise of its kind, and I find it difficult to believe that any summer school, before or since, has given more enjoyment and that, although not the main purpose, was not unimportant.

There is, of course, no reason at all why school-children should not go abroad for pleasure only. Indeed, it is odd to find how school parties—as well as

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groups of older people—seek to justify a continental holiday by declaring that the aim is to promote international understanding. The phrase is used as if it meant the same as good fellowship: wringing the foreigner by the hand, overlooking the way he uses his knife and fork, applauding his folk songs and trying to sing some back, exchanging addresses, photographs, postage stamps and vows of eternal friendship. None of these things contribute to understanding between governments—the kind that leads to reciprocal recognition of interests. Such inter-governmental understanding (we have it with France, for example) greatly reduces the likelihood of war, whereas good fellowship is war's first victim.

It seems as if adults have some secret guilt about disliking foreigners and that they have projected this on to children and adolescents—who are not in themselves, I think, hostile to anyone of their own age until something causes it. Why cannot the young, who are entitled to fun, travel for fun? I said something like this once to a student who was leading a party of young people across Europe 'in the cause of international understanding.' His face fell at my lack of idealism, but as it later turned out, he and his companions quarrelled before Calais and separated before they reached the Alps.

Two grammar-school masters of my acquaintance who took a lorry-load of boys as far as Yugoslavia, did better because their aim was more limited. It was to get as far as possible, as cheaply as possible. Sensibly, they

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distributed the responsibility for economy, including the buying of food and the banking of pocket money, among the boys—with striking and lasting results on one particular boy, whose character increased in stature after he had disbursed £70 in seven different currencies. A humble objective often brings unexpected rewards.

The truth is, it does not matter to the world that we like the French, dislike the Germans, appreciate the Dutch, find the Italians amusing, and so on. If we want to help the cause of international harmony we can really do it best at home. ‘What can one do to help promote peace?’ I heard a tense and earnest teacher ask the Director of Unesco at a public meeting. ‘You can do three things,’ came the reply. These were: to make a study of some international problem that needs unravelling; to compare history text books with a teacher in some foreign country, and to give some practical help where it is needed—for example, through the Unesco Gift Coupon Scheme.

A few weeks later a former minister of state, asked to address a meeting of youth leaders on ‘Youth and International Relations’, began by confessing that he found international relations incomprehensible. This opening cleared the way for a most practical proposal. He suggested that every young person in a youth organization should befriend one of our own colonial fellow citizens, if only by correspondence. Such friendliness, not only good in itself, was a rare opportunity to influence relations between countries, for if it happened extensively it

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could lessen the number of Africans and Asiatics who feel outcasts in Britain and go home embittered.

There are indeed many practical possibilities for those who have left school and the more action and less idealistic talk the more effective they are likely to be. But with children it is not so easy and one should perhaps not stir up their emotions too much over problems that belong to grown-ups.

‘We want to *do* something,’ three small girls once said to me after they had been to a mass meeting in the town. ‘What can we *do* to help the League of Nations?’

And I could think of nothing but to tell them that the local branch of the League of Nations Union had been asking for volunteers to address envelopes.

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Girls' public schools do not, even at their best, acquire the prestige and publicity of the boys' schools which they imitate, but everyone who reads this book is likely to have heard of St. Loys. The buildings which rise so majestically against the landscape as almost to demean it include the houses where, in groups of eighty or so and under a house-mistress, the girls eat, sleep, do their preparation and spend some of their indoor free time. Everything is on a large scale, unpretentious but generous.

It is the library which I chiefly recall, and not only for its size and harmony but also because among the current reviews and periodicals displayed near the entrance there was a copy of the Bulletin (as it was then called) of the Institute of International Affairs.

It was only a matter of months since I had disagreed with a member of its editorial board who thought it suitable for school use. I could not imagine, as he

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apparently did, a sixth form boy or girl selecting this collection of specialized articles for free-time reading. I thought it belonged to the university not the school level, for at school the boy or girl does not choose to read on intellectual tip-toe, although he will do this if there is an incentive.

But perhaps I had been wrong and the day I faced the sixth form of St. Loys from the platform of the assembly hall this was one of many doubts that I concealed under a mask of confidence. There were about eighty girls, of whom some were likely to go to the university. Others had no such expectations but had been persuaded by the headmistress—one of the great ones of her day, to whom I cannot do justice in a passing reference—to stay beyond their School Certificate examination. After years of good teaching in small classes, and in what might be called a masculine tradition, they might, I thought, be different from other schoolgirls I had known. There was another point also. Although many of the St. Loys girls came from homes that were distinguished more by wealth than intellect, there were many others whose fathers were well-known figures in public life or the professions. These in particular were the ones who reached the sixth and remained there for a year or two. It might be said therefore that I had the *crème de la crème* before me.

I had parted company with Wyngates to live a free-lance life in which conducting school parliaments as a visiting teacher was for the moment the main feature. It had proved easy-going in several small indepen-

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dent schools, but here was a different proposition altogether.

I spent the first visit in describing the procedure and making all the practical arrangements. The prospective parliamentary members were interested, amused and entirely co-operative. They chose a prime minister who would appoint the other members of the Cabinet. They divided themselves sensibly between Government supporters and Opposition, quickly disposing of what I now regarded as a universal preference to be against the Government. They asked reasonable questions and they did not press for the introduction of party politics after I had pointed out the disadvantages of dissension and partisanship in the pursuit of truth. It was all much easier than I expected, for they were a formidable crowd and many had such an adult manner that I had been afraid they would despise my plan as childish. Perhaps I was already beginning to see that their confident bearing was not a picture of themselves as they really were. At all events when I made it clear that everyone would have to address the House they made the same display of alarm as in varying degrees had happened everywhere else and among younger girls.

Next week the St. Loys House of Commons began its deliberations and they could hardly have been worse. Although I had prohibited the reading of speeches, everyone had written out what she proposed to say and few could take their eyes from the scraps of paper in their hands. What they read was dead matter, lifted as it stood from a newspaper, and no more the natural

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phrases of the girl who spoke them than her manner of being quite at ease. They were like caricatures of grown-ups, especially that kind of public speaker who assumes that his status entitles him to speak in public but has no idea of the ineptitude of his delivery. They either read what they had to say rapidly and with constant correction, or else they made a show of speaking from notes, interspersing their phrases lavishly with 'ums' and 'ers'. The general impression was of ineffable boredom.

They went on like this for several weeks despite the criticisms and exhortations made by me at the end of each sitting. Then quite suddenly they changed and the whole thing became alive. They began to speak well and naturally, using their own adequate vocabulary and enjoying the make-believe with mock dignity, or forgetting it altogether in serious questions and thoughtful answers. They pressed each other for information, they came to accept individual interests, they refused to be bored, they were ready to be sympathetic, they often rocked with laughter, and they were objective. Also, of course, for the first time, they began to read the newspapers and perhaps sometimes the periodicals and learned reviews.

The truth was that hitherto they had been paralysed by self-consciousness. In this condition they had had to imitate somebody—but whom? Doubtless they had observed their mothers and grandmothers opening village fêtes or supporting husbands at political meetings, but the soft graces and exaggerated unprofessionalism of such feminine performance were neither suited



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to the agenda of a parliament nor the public school tradition of St. Loys. The only alternative was to try to talk like a man, and as they were not clever enough to imitate an accomplished speaker they had reproduced the mannerisms of the other kind.

The parliament now went ahead as the others had done, but I will not bore the reader by recounting how the St. Loys' girls discussed the Spanish Civil War, the menace of Nazism, the depressed areas, the Loch Ness monster or ribbon development along the highways. Nor will I refer again to the procedure of this mock institution; for any who may be interested the standing orders of the parliament are reproduced in an appendix.

Least of all do I want to suggest that the parliamentary method was the only one to bring about a transformation. Any good teacher will think of other and probably better methods. The point I would tentatively make is that some imaginative approach is as necessary with a large sixth form in a girls' public school as with any other girls, if you wish to awaken them to the world they are about to enter. It is usually assumed that a course of lectures, or even an occasional single lecture, is a stimulating addition to anything the history teacher can fit in to her syllabus, but often it is a waste of time. At St. Loys a widely travelled and knowledgeable man, lately retired from one of the services, used to give four or five lectures a term on 'current affairs' to the senior half of the school. I saw some of the essays which were written for him on the subject matter of his talks;

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they were dead matter, words written mechanically from notes taken assiduously.

When I began to be a visiting speaker and organizer of school parliaments there were some who thought that I should find my ignorance of the children a great handicap. This did not, however, prove a difficulty. There was always one member of the staff who agreed to advise and help me, and I stayed long enough at each school to meet the leaders and help the diffident. Any drawback was greatly outweighed by the immense advantage of having adequate time to read and reflect, as well as to see for myself what had not hitherto been possible. A short visit to British West Africa, for example, taught me much that I could not have learnt at home, and I have often regretted that thousands of teachers of history, geography and current affairs should not have the same chance. Mine was a piece of private good fortune that I could not have seized if I had been rigidly bound by school terms, just as I would not have dared to cut adrift from proper employment if I had been qualifying for a pension.

There is much talk nowadays of the need to make us all aware of our fellow subjects in British dependencies and the British League of Commonwealth and Empire has begun to arrange a few exchanges with teachers in the colonies as it does in much larger numbers with teachers in the dominions. But not much can be done in this way since, for the present, the exchanges would mostly have to be with European schools.

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Somebody, someday, will want to send crowds of schoolchildren to spend their holidays in the colonies—I rather think it has already been suggested. This in my view would not be money well spent. On the other hand if some munificent foundation, or large business seeking escape from excessive taxation, would establish travel bursaries to send every teacher of current or colonial affairs to spend a holiday in East or West Africa, the West Indies, Malaya, or in some of the delectable islands which to most of us are pink lines on a map, it would be an imaginative investment. The idea is sufficiently fraught with difficulties to commend itself to somebody who prefers the formidable type of challenge—and happily there are such. One practicable question would be, where should they stay? If they are to understand the feelings of both the rulers (or protectors) and ruled they should not be merely European guests. I have no doubt many young teachers would be more than ready to sleep on an African mat after a supper of groundnut stew. One of my Saltlands colleagues, at all events, did a walking tour in the Gold Coast with an African woman friend, and although I cannot vouch for the stew she certainly lived as an African for the time being. On the other hand it would be the greatest misfortune if my imaginary teacher did not associate with the Europeans as well, particularly those who are devoted to raising the colonial standard of life. One way and another this looks like something that the missionary societies could handle, once the wealthy benefactor is found.

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The war brought an end to the St. Loys and the other parliaments, for some of the schools moved to safer localities and I myself had volunteered to help with the evacuation of the London schoolchildren. As I had shepherded so many children across Europe I thought I might be useful in getting others into the home counties. The two experiences however were not comparable. The class of dockland children allotted to me by their headmaster were all boys and younger than any I had looked after before. First I had to see that they had their right clothing. ('Where are your pants, Bailey?' 'Don't wear 'em, miss.') Then I had to keep an eye on them on a journey to an unnamed destination ('Miss! Miss! Look at them cows!'); and finally I had to act as a general welfare officer. There was another school in the same reception area and coming from an equally poor district. The difference between the two headmasters was striking. My headmaster was civilized and devoted to his school, his opposite number was neither.

While I was busy with all sorts of practical matters connected with mackintosh sheets and anti-lice lotions, I heard that a finishing school from abroad had arrived in the large house at the top of the village. They had fled before the storm and were now trying to carry on as before. I suggested to their headmistress that a course of lectures on the background of the war might be a suitable innovation and she invited me to give them.

I remember my first day very well. About a dozen girls sat languidly at their desks. Their names, on the

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paper before me, were familiar from my customary reading of the *Tatler* at the hairdresser's. I had planned a short course on contemporary Europe, but I thought we would begin at the beginning, so I asked them to jot down what they thought was the first essential of democracy. They looked up at me with supercilious expressions of incomprehension.

'Well,' I said, 'we are fighting for democracy. What is it? What does it mean? Perhaps it means various things. Just put down the first thing that democracy means to you.'

Five of them quite independently put down 'The King.'

'But what about France?' I said (this was before June 1940), 'don't you call France a democracy?' 'Oh *no*,' said one girl, 'France is a republic.' 'So a republic is not a democracy?' 'Oh *no*,' they said.

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## TECHNICAL STUDENTS

**A**lthough this chapter is concerned with recent experiences, I must introduce them by going back some years to an episode which occurred while I was at Wyngates.

I was at that time in hot pursuit of the subject matter of civics, both as a teacher and writer, and appreciating in no small measure the justification it gave for observing at first hand how things happen. (It is perhaps a typically feminine curiosity to want to know how, humanly speaking, an institution works, just as it seems to be typically masculine to want to examine a piece of machinery.) My hobby—as I think I should call it, since my main obligation as well as my chief pleasure was to teach English—prompted various personal expeditions. It took me to the gallery of the House of Lords, many times to the House of Commons, to council chambers and courts of law. All these were easy going; other expeditions required more contriving. At a

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time of miners' unrest I went with a friend down a Somerset coalmine. Wearing lamps on our heads we walked for what seemed an immense distance underground along a railway track, hurrying into a refuge, carved like a cave from the rocky wall, when the trucks came rattling by. Where the track ended we found a man lying in a tunnel that was perhaps three feet high; at his invitation I crawled after him and took his pick to hack out a piece of coal. He told me that we were a quarter of a mile under the earth. 'Up there,' he said, 'they don't know what goes on down here,' and indeed the eerie underworld had to be visited to be understood. We were surrounded by a great silence so that our voices had a special reality, but when we stopped speaking to listen we could hear the knock, knock, of some miner far away in his tunnelling, and a departing truck becoming a twisted thread of sound. It was exceedingly hot and on our long walk back my friend became faint. I, too, was glad when the cage rose to the daylight. I had brought my coal with me and I kept it, wrapped up in brown paper, for years.

Later, in the time of the great economic depression, I spent a few days in the Rhondda Valley. A middle-aged Welshman, small, neat and agile, led me up the hill to where the shaft went down unused and the mechanism stood abandoned. 'I would go down again tomorrow,' he said, 'if I could.' He had been out of work for fourteen years. The next day I talked to a miner's wife who had sold every unnecessary household possession except a few brightly polished brass candlesticks on the mantel-

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piece. She was full of spirit, but as she talked she wept for the children who had had to go away to look for work. Next door, her neighbour, thin and prematurely old, cried from physical weakness. Another time I followed a warder round the hollow galleries of Pentonville prison, where there were no sounds but the clinking of keys and the slamming of iron doors. I saw the cell that one reads about, with its plank bed and the eating utensils arranged against the high blank wall.

I assumed that I was putting all this to satisfactory account by imparting a reality to my lessons. Nothing else seemed necessary, until I had a salutary set-back from a child whom I will call Maud.

In her first term of civics Maud showed none of that lively curiosity that I have described in Chapter One and which I had now come to expect as a matter of course. She never asked a question and if I put one to her she had no answer. She sat impassively at the back of the room and the muscles of her face never moved at my dramatic descriptions or enlivening jokes. Her written work was the worst of its kind that I had ever had to correct. Where the others wrote a page she would write two or three untidy lines. When I told her to do it again, the second attempt was tidier but equally meagre. When she had to read a chapter in the text book that had been written for her delight, she might have been reading a continental Bradshaw, for all the sense it made to her.

When I finally found out how she could be taught it was quite fortuitous. Towards the end of one term it so



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happened that there was a parliamentary election and polling day coincided with my junior civics lesson. It suddenly occurred to me that I might take the class with me when I went to vote.

It was a pleasurable outing and I remember how the children skipped along, in a bunch rather than a crocodile, begging me to say whom I was going to vote for. At that hour of the morning the polling station was empty and an amused policeman allowed the whole group to stand inside the door where they could watch me go up to the table, give my name and number, receive my ballot paper, take it behind one of the partitions, and finally drop it in the black box. Behind them was a large notice headed, 'Warning to Voters', and this they read to the end before we set off on the homeward journey. Having successfully parried all their questions about my choice of candidates and reminded them of the advantages of the secret ballot, I told them, for their written work, to describe the process of voting.

Later in the week when I sat down to correct their exercises I was astonished to find that Maud had written three and a half pages in a careful round hand. It was an account of our outing, accurate in every detail, and it concluded with a statement about the penalties I would incur ('Miss Gibberd might have to go to prison') if by any chance I had voted twice—an offence, I could not help but feel, that she devoutly hoped had happened. It was as good, if not better, than the work produced by anyone else in the class

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and when I read it aloud, with suitable words of commendation, the child's poker-like face relaxed and slowly turned pink with mingled embarrassment and gratification.

The story ought to end with an account of Maud's later and more successful career, but in the way things happen, we parted company just after this turning point. I seem to remember another exercise which, though nothing like so good, was far better than her former display of helplessness, but examinations and other end-of-term happenings put an end to ordinary lessons, and then Maud went off to try her skill elsewhere.

This visit to the polling station was not the first outing of its kind. I had, for instance, been accustomed to take each successive civics class to town council meetings. We had sat in a special row of chairs in order to have a good view and the councillors, who cast amused glances at the row of demure faces, would once in a way make public reference to our presence. This embarrassed me but not the children who found the personalities of the councillors absorbing and were quick to perceive the motives behind their arguments. After three-quarters of an hour I would send a piece of paper and pencil along the row with the following instruction at the top: 'Put a cross here if you would like us to go now.' The paper always came back a blank. Perhaps they want to miss an arithmetic lesson, I used to think. I could never quite believe that they enjoyed themselves as much as they afterwards told me, and I was always surprised to

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discover how much they understood, even though I had prepared them in advance. after extracting the agenda from a reluctant town clerk. In any case, I regarded the outing as an excrescence, or as Miss Bagstock would have said, 'a frill', and I let other opportunities for personal observation go by because of the difficulties of arranging them.

What I learned from Maud was, what teachers know in theory if not from experience, that what the child sees for himself he believes, and that some children—and I suspect that Maud, for all she had somehow got through the Wyngates entrance test, was one of them—are unable to learn from books.

Most of us have these blank spots somewhere and an enthusiastic teacher can inflame the sense of inadequacy which they produce, as I found myself when I once accompanied a young gymnastic mistress to an advanced dancing class. Having learnt what dancing steps I knew by imitation rather than instruction, I found it next to impossible to do the things which our dashing, competent and self-satisfied instructress described. I seemed always to be a step behind and consequently stumbled on my partner's feet. The more I tried the worse I became, and the worse my performance the greater my frenzy. The music mounted, the couples swirled, only I was out of it all and my poor partner with me. When the hateful teacher finally swept across the room and clasped me to her amazonian bosom I was beyond learning anything.

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A few years ago I had occasion to remember the lesson learnt from Maud. At that time I was arranging the general education in a scheme of domestic training and had to visit the widely separated centres where the training was taking place. The 'students'—as they were called, although many of them had only recently left their secondary modern schools—all took a course which included citizenship, with a special emphasis on local government—a subject that was quite new to them.

The usual practice was that the students went to the nearest technical institute where, like the boys and girls who were on occasional 'day release' from their jobs, they could be fitted into the time-tables of those teachers who taught general as distinct from technical subjects. Where this could not be arranged a teacher came to the centre.

At Long Chillingham the first set of students were above the average in age and a promising set of young women. They were mostly between eighteen and twenty-five and had either been in the services or on war work. While it could not be said that they were enthusiastic about their general education, on Thursday afternoons they doffed their aprons cheerfully enough and set off in their private bus for the 'tec' in the neighbouring market town. They went into Mr. Brown's classroom as the boys who were builders' apprentices came out.

Mr. Brown was kind and patient, but he was not in the best of health and had too much to do. His great

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interest was in running a small library for the boys, and to see him among a group of young ruffians whom he had somehow taught to take pleasure in reading, was to perceive his private triumph. But in a technical college it is often only the trade teachers who may specialize and willy-nilly Mr. Brown had to teach civics as well as English language and literature—and maybe much else besides. He taught with clarity and accuracy but he was like a piece of elastic that has been stretched too often.

The girls were disposed to be helpful. They were greatly enjoying their domestic training and their communal life at Long Chillingham, and had no grudge to work off on an easy victim. They put on a mask of attention behind which they first felt sorry for poor Mr. Brown, and then let their thoughts ramble pleasantly. It was the afternoon, they had had a good meal, the atmosphere of all classrooms gets heavy. Now and then a hand would come up to a mouth as a yawn was stifled. In front of them on the desks their notebooks lay open, but the pages remained blank under the heading 'Local Government'. Presently, when Mr. Brown would recapitulate and write a few words on the blackboard, they would copy them down under the conviction that they were taking notes. The technique of getting the gist of a lesson on paper had never been taught them. It seldom is.

After five months I had to examine these students in what they had learned with Mr. Brown. I interviewed them singly.

"Tell me, what do local councils *do*?"

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‘Well, they look after the people in the neighbourhood.’

‘Yes. What do they do for them?’

‘Well, their health and welfare and all that—anything for the good of the people.’

‘Yes. Can you tell me any one benefit you yourself enjoy through X County Council?’

‘National Health?’

So it went on. Little crumbs of knowledge would sometimes be offered but they had lodged accidentally in the memory. At other times the candidate would apologize and say that she had missed two of Mr. Brown’s lectures or that although he was very nice she found him difficult to follow.

But exactly the same thing happened a hundred miles away where Miss Black, who taught another set of girls in their own training centre, plodded on with more freshness and vitality than Mr. Brown, but with less knowledge and even less success. Miss Black, however, I could persuade whereas Mr. Brown was like a man too exhausted near the end of a long journey to be able to step off the hard road on to the softer grass. Miss Black eventually invited an official from the town hall to speak on local government to the students and afterwards she took them to observe a council meeting. The invitation was a risk. One ought to be sure of one’s speaker in such cases. They can sometimes be unintelligible and at other times one almost regrets their intelligibility. Once, for example, when I asked a woman councillor to talk to a civics class about her

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experiences, she spent half an hour explaining why nursery schools were a mistake.

But Miss Black, taking on chance her official from the town clerk's department, was lucky. In the fortnight which included his talk and the visit to the council meeting the students woke up to local government and absorbed information which had fallen from Miss Black's lips in vain. In fact, the result was so remarkable that in another town where one of the training centres had newly opened I made a reconnaissance visit to the council chamber to be sure that the public gallery would have room for all the students. The deputy town clerk who received me was not very happy about the proposed visit. 'I don't think it will be very edifying for your girls,' he said. 'Our councillors can be rather quarrelsome.' 'Splendid,' I said, 'that is just the sort of thing I want them to find out.'

At this centre a willing young Scotswoman, who was an instructor in housework and cooking most of the day, began to teach herself enough local government to be one step ahead of the students. She studied the empty council chamber and took her students for a lesson there before they went to enjoy the spectacle of the quarrelsome councillors. She then set herself to do the same thing at the magistrates' court.

But, alas, most of these pleasant domestic science teachers knew nothing about public affairs and if they approved of the students learning about these things, it was only because they vaguely believed in some general education for them, not because citizenship had any

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vital meaning. Indeed they sometimes felt that time could ill be spared for this kind of extra. Their practical teaching, of course, touched on citizenship a dozen times a day but they were unaware of the connection. Whereas the kitchen tap is not an inspiring point of departure for the ordinary school child, it is not a bad one for the very young domestic science student. Similarly with the drains, the dust-bin, the sausages that can be eaten with impunity, the bananas bought by weight, the electric iron, the paraffin fire-lighter and the relation between soapsuds and margarine. But if the domestic science teacher has not had her own mind liberalized during and by means of her own training, she cannot fully exploit the training she herself gives. Nevertheless these vicious circles do break down and I have no doubt that although I could not find them a few years ago, somewhere there must be teachers imparting domestic knowledge imaginatively.

In the technical colleges which our young students attended there was always this same divorce between the technique that the boy or girl wanted to master and the general education which it was agreed that they must have. Not all technical learning can be so happily married to social studies as domestic science, and forced marriages are inadvisable. But since the technical student is instinctively resistant to academic teaching one would expect to find that in technical institutions more than anywhere else the greatest trouble was taken to make general education as alluring as possible. I can only say that I was sorry not only for the students whom



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I myself was obliged to send to these colleges for their English, arithmetic and social studies, but for all the other students who learned these things there. Out of half-a-dozen in widely separated towns I only found one where there was hope that a student might profit from the classes. The repetition of unimaginative dreariness was disappointing and once when I thought to have struck gold it turned out to be gilt paint. This college had so many 'day release' students from local firms that it put someone in special charge and this teacher organized regular tours of the town as part of the social studies. But as it turned out the tours were more of a diversion than part of a course. There was much tramping hither and thither and the privilege, such as it was, was open to all and sundry. No special preparation was given and little of importance was seen.

In fairness it must be said that the great numbers presented a certain difficulty. I thought perhaps the college was finding a way over this when I heard they had had a film show—for what only a few can see in actuality three hundred can view on a screen. However when I asked what films had been shown during the hour and a half when all work was suspended, I found that there had been four of them, entirely unrelated to one another. The audience had been switched from the bread-fruit tree in Ceylon to a model secondary modern school in England. The other two films which I cannot remember were equally diverse.

The number of films made especially for schools were indeed few and some of them, like the first ones

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produced to present the United Nations, painfully inadequate. Indeed the film companies had curious ideas as to what would be useful to the teacher and had gradually to be persuaded to listen to those who knew.

It was about the time of which I write that the Educational Foundation for Visual Aids was established to supply equipment to schools and to be the central distributing body for films and film strips. Perhaps it is owing to its work and influence as well as to the National Committee for Visual Aids (where teachers meet and state their needs to the companies) that some bad gaps in educational films have been filled, although how well I cannot say as I have not seen the films. But now, after this spurt forward, educational film-making is virtually at a standstill because it is not a commercial proposition. It seems a pity that no way out of this impasse has been found. Perhaps if the films were imaginative enough they would be good box-office as well as good for school use—many adults listen avidly to school broadcasts. Will television be the answer?

I must now return to my domestic science students most of whom I left languishing in the local technical institutes in the name of general education. Apart from Mr. Brown's first set, they were mostly very young and raw, straight from their secondary modern schools in fact. How could their fruitless hours at the 'tec' be improved on? One of my colleagues happened upon an answer. To fill up a spare hour in a manner that she hoped would be worth while, she sent a dozen of them

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into a room where she had put an assortment of books; she then set the students questions to be answered, as best they could from the sources at hand. They took to this with zest and were indefatigable in turning pages in search of information. Building on this idea we worked out some question papers on local and national affairs, suggested hunting-grounds for the answers and left them to it. Again they worked with a will and produced commendable results. For quite extraneous reasons this short experiment had to end when it had hardly begun, but in the past eighteen months I have seen it tried at length in a secondary modern school where the children are of the roughest and their intelligence generally poor. They would go on, it seemed tirelessly, groping their way through encyclopaedias, histories, geographies, and other formidable volumes in search of what they wanted.

All over the world technical education is on the ascendant and everywhere the liberal teacher is concerned about the general education of the technical student—whether he is a small boy in the workshop of his secondary school, an older one in a technical institute or an undergraduate in a technological university. Something of the teacher's anxiety was expressed by the Indian who said that his country did not want to produce 'scientists without conscience or technicians without taste'.

In Britain something is happening at the bottom. Under the 1944 Act we are supposed to have technical

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secondary schools as well as grammar schools and secondary modern schools and although there are not many of them yet, those that exist are very different from the trade schools from which they partly derive. The Allenby school, for instance, which I described in Chapter Threc, no longer makes vague gestures towards ordinary subjects but beckons them into the time-table. The best secondary technical schools do not teach their pupils a trade or embark them on a profession, but exploit some special practical interest—building, housewifery, nursing, engineering, for example—and try to build on it in the direction of what, for lack of a better word, might be called culture. This if it can be done will be the answer for the boys and girls who are going ultimately to work with their hands. But in the meantime there are two million boys and girls on ‘day release’ schemes and uncounted thousands in apprenticeship and other forms of training who receive ‘general education’ as something apart, and often unwillingly. Sometimes the teacher fills in the time in any way he fancies—I was told of one who, finding some pre-nursing students could not spell, made them learn some difficult words backwards as well as forwards. This sort of indifferent lip service in any subject will make the student long to be done with it for ever.



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**I**n the preceding pages I have from time to time deduced this and that from the experiences recalled and these minor conclusions I shall leave where they are, embedded in their own data. Many of them are, no doubt, open to criticism, as I am, myself, I hope, to conviction.

But there are two larger conclusions to which I would give special emphasis. The first is that when young people are taught those things that I have included under the general name of politics the teaching should be honest, and the subject matter real. It is, as I have shown in Chapter One, a matter of giving lessons not on parliament but on the day to day work of its members, not on the Crown but the Queen, not on judiciary but on judges, juries, J.P.s and magistrates' clerks. It is easier for an inexperienced teacher to expound theory, rather than practice, for the theory is there in all the books and the real thing far away. It is

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also quicker. One could, for example, given an un-enquiring class, dispose of local government in two or three lesson periods. First comes a diagram on the blackboard, a sort of family tree with government departments at the top and the parish council at the bottom; then we have lists of the responsibilities of respective councils, with permissive powers in brackets. This copied faithfully into note-books might do for the first lesson. In the second the class is told about rates and rateable value, the times and manner of elections, the functions of aldermen and mayors. Except for some history, the ground has now been covered sufficiently for an elementary study, but even if it is remembered all the real questions have been overlooked. For instance: why do some people want to become local councillors? How do they set about trying to get elected? Why are there political parties in these elections? Why are there relatively few young councillors? What sort of things do council meetings argue about? What abilities and personal qualities are required? Can a councillor use his position to feather his own nest? Must he be interested in everything from the library rate to rights-of-way?

We do not need to shelter young minds from the mixed motives and other frailties of the adult world—or if we do, then the children are too young to learn this subject. Some false tenderness seems to have hung over from Victorian times, but it is inappropriate to our tougher youth. Granted that the swing has gone too far in the direction of disillusion, let us nevertheless seize

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what is valuable in the kernel of cynicism and discard the husk. It needs of course to be salted with humour, or more accurately, good humour. Boys and girls in their later teens love to laugh at the disingenuousness of their elders, and why should they not?

But to do the job properly something more is needed. The human scene, whether it be in parliament, a borough council, the magistrates' court, or the United Nations, should be chiefly enjoyed, not frivolously, not for some chance joke, but because, if rightly presented, there is nothing more interesting than real life. This incidentally was the discovery of the first documentary film-makers. John Grierson called their productions 'the imaginative treatment of actuality' and if anyone wants to see how much romantic reality can lie behind the sober word 'civics' let him read Grierson's collected writings.\*

Much of our abortive teaching in other subjects besides politics comes from our trying to teach children in the way we ourselves were taught in our student days. Nothing could be more natural, more sanctioned by the past; it is the way the torch, the symbol of enlightenment, has been passed on through the ages. But we live in a different age when enlightenment is for each according to his ability, and now a thousand candles must be lit from the torch's flame. Where the gulf between teacher and taught yawns most widely, in what are called the under-developed countries, the need for special methods is too obvious to be ignored

\* *Grierson on Documentary*, by Forsyth Hardy.

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and perhaps nowhere is the teacher's art more imaginatively exercised than under the palm trees and on the edge of the desert. Behind phrases like 'community development' and 'fundamental education' which point to the vast numbers of potential pupils of all ages and their elementary requirements, something new is happening. It is happening in a less degree in our own secondary modern and technical schools, but the fear of letting go the academic tradition for something unknown—it is still of course appropriate for the few—impedes it. It is a healthy fear, too, for if the kind of imagination applied to actuality is unsound we get that depressingly cheerful opening to the blessings of organized society which asks the child to simulate interest in something that he knows too well, like the tap in the kitchen, the bread and margarine he had at breakfast or the classroom in which he now sits. To see wonder in familiar things is the end not the beginning of education and in any case the state is not providence, and what has been contrived by man to make man's life easier does not derive exclusively from man's love for man.

All this seems, and always seemed to me, to be the first thing necessary and beside the question as to how one can, day by day, present a living reality to one's pupils, other questions dwindle. There is for example the teacher's personal partisanship and whether he should divulge it. I have always found it much easier not to do so and according to some who write to the Press on these matters that would make me a colourless cipher. I hope it is apparent from this book that a class's



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interest in public affairs need not depend on anyone taking sides. That is merely to hide the living picture in smoke. Children and young people always ask you what you think, but you do not always have to answer. On the other hand you do not have to be mysteriously secretive. In the two schools where I stayed for some years the sixth forms knew what party I would vote for, but were not, I think, greatly interested.

At other times and places there have been guesses. There was a by-election when I was at Hugenfield and when I came back from a private outing I found it was the general belief that I had been meeting the liberal candidate. A year or two later, at a general election, I was asked to address some two hundred student nurses on the views of the parties. To test my own fairness I asked them to tell me at the end what party they thought I supported, although I would not tell them if they were right or wrong. They all said I was a conservative. Again, much more recently, I gave a similar talk in Germany to some two hundred men and women who were doing an interpreter's training and I asked them afterwards to tell me by a show of hands what party I seemed to favour. The votes were almost evenly divided. Invited to speak on the same election to a girls' grammar school in London, I made the same request but the majority put me slightly to the left.

I would naturally never have tested audience reactions in this way with children or students I was teaching day by day. It was no more than a game with myself to find out whether I was being as fair as I

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wished to be and I only give the information to show that a teacher's personal political convictions do not matter so long as while he is teaching he puts them aside.

The second main conclusion is that the traditional type of British school with its prefects or monitors, its *esprit de corps* fostered by a house system and organized games is not particularly suitable for girls and is a poor training for citizenship. Perhaps it is not always suitable for boys, but that others must judge.

By not suitable I mean that it does not bring out the qualities which belong to women, but encourages them to wear a mask. The successful product of this system who was once a fidgety little girl, fascinated by the contents of her pencil box, enjoying the smell of her new text-books, and more interested in whether a loose hairpin is going to fall from the history teacher's head than in what happened to Hengist and Horsa, this same girl at eighteen may have an entirely artificial adult manner before her elders, an amiable but spurious sociability. She has a jargon of hyperbole and affectation and her reactions and opinions are forcible because they are not genuine. No wonder that in the privacy of the home she is often silent, irritable or unexpectedly truculent, for happily something of her original self is still there and because she has not really found her feet at all she has to give vent to her vexation. I have perhaps overdrawn the picture and many a school, especially a girls' grammar school, would rightly disown

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it. But even when the orthodox system is managed by modern feminine schoolmistresses with wide interests, it still tends to produce a type among those who are considered its successful products. At seventeen or eighteen, these girls sometimes seem too good, too sensible, too anxious to be sweet and kind. It is as if they were little mirrors to the wishes of their devoted teachers. Perhaps it does not matter; perhaps their sweetness is genuine—it goes down a long way at all events. Or perhaps like kittens who have found kindness and admiration irresistible, they have wholly adapted themselves except for some hidden elemental impulse which one day will send them leaping out of the window. In any case the successful products are the few. They are the favoured ones, the prefects to whom power has been delegated, the games captains whom the little ones cheer, the prize-winners of whom other children's parents stand in awe. What about the other five hundred—for it may be as many nowadays? They also get their share of interest and affection, but if you have not been made a prefect it is a poor compensation to have your name read out as flower monitress. And if you can neither distinguish yourself at lessons nor games, you do not amount to much in your own estimation, for all the headmistress's homilies about everybody counting. 'We cannot all be leaders', she says, but all the fun seems to go to those who are. There is nothing left but to admire the successful ones and take an excitable personal pride in the victories of our side, whether it is form, 'house' or the school itself. The few

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who do not mind about collective success in competitions and games feel self-reproach.

What sort of training for future citizenship is this, if any? What has this emotional support of one's 'side', this concern for its victory, this hero-worship of leaders, to do with justice and tolerance, consideration for one's neighbour, accepting personal inconvenience for the common good, feeling responsible, fulfilling obligations, and the eternal vigilance for safeguarding freedom? The connection is not clear. Yet we are constantly told that by learning to live in the community of the school the child naturally passes into the widening communities of the locality, the nation and the world. But how can that be? Life under a mayor and corporation bears little resemblance to life under a headmistress, her staff and prefects; and at the other extreme, a citizen of the world, which is what we all are called on to be, has no 'side' to take unless and until other forms of planetary life reveal themselves.

There remains national life, and for that the traditional type of school would seem most aptly suited if 'my country right or wrong' was still the sentiment to inspire it, and if the exercise of power, or submission to it, were the two kinds of behaviour required of adult women. These suppositions are such nonsense that one is left wondering why girls' schools have not long ceased to model their organization on boys' schools.

The traditional type of British school was not designed for girls and what happened when women adopted it was not the transplantation of a tradition but

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its imitation. In the boys' grammar schools the headmaster was often himself the product of a public school, but in the girls' day schools there could be no such direct descent. Miss Beale, who founded Cheltenham Ladies' College, and the Miss Lawrences who established Roe-dean, were, like other feminists of their day, chiefly concerned in gaining equality for women. It was natural that as well as putting girls in for the same examinations as boys they should organize them in the same way and make them play their games in the same spirit. But the slightly spurious air which all imitations assume has never been dispersed, and while the boy to whom power has been delegated, or who captains an eleven, is taken seriously by the outside world, his opposite number in a girls' school provokes a smile.

It seems a pity to fool ourselves over this solecism. It may be better to have a prefect system in a girls' school than no system at all. It saves thinking out an alternative. It can be soft-pedalled to seem less masculine and it is not the only means by which characters are trained. But, nevertheless, it remains in the end a rather silly bit of mimicry.

In earlier chapters I have referred to two schools which broke away from this imitation. In one case I could only describe the school as it struck a temporary member of the staff, in the other I have shown in some detail how a constitution devised especially to replace the prefect system worked and with what results. But, as I hope was also apparent, I have not described this school as a possible prototype. It was merely given as

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an example of what can be done if you try to spread responsibility as widely as possible, bestowing it, and the limited personal freedom that must go with it, in accordance with each child's potentialities. (The last word is important, for in education, as in statesmanship, you have to take risks. To say a child is ready for responsibility means that you think the chances are that she will rise to it, and therefore blossom out because of it.) Other schools have worked out their own systems and sometimes there is no system, in the British meaning of the word, at all, but only common sense. At a teachers' seminar in Germany when we all got rather up in the air on some such subject as 'Democracy and the Schools', I remember a woman teacher of the older generation, who had been finding her feet again after some years under the Nazis, bringing us back to earth by saying that she had given small responsibilities to as many of her young children as possible and that the effect on their characters had been remarkable.

Life in a school should certainly give some training for adult life in relation to others—which includes citizenship—as well for life in solitude—where it is even more important, but it is not only over the prefect system and organized games that our thinking has got bogged. There is a tendency to begin at the end which we cannot see instead of at the beginning which is under our eyes. People try to give a picture of 'a good citizen' and set up some uninspiring effigy that might

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have been conceived in Children's Hour between a Director of Education and a Public Relations Officer. We do not want any one type of adult citizen, and we could not produce one under a democracy. It is probably a mistake even to try to graft a sense of public duty on young consciences. Exhortations do little good and sometimes some harm for they can make the prospect of well-doing seem wearisome. 'Education', a working girl once said to me, 'is just being with educated people', and certainly the social virtues are the more likely to spread the less they are preached and the more they are practised.

If the contemporary world, its organization, its troubles, its possibilities, are taught to children, as part of their school lessons, in the realistic way I have suggested, then the world will at least seem real to most of them and perhaps more than of passing interest to a few. This is the first step. The next one, and all the rest, should be to avoid putting obstacles in the child's way and to remove those that are already there. By obstacles I mean certain attitudes of mind that might later prevent a young adult from performing the kind of public service that he desires, or lead another young adult perversely to obstruct him. Among such attitudes are cocksureness, lack of confidence, wishful thinking, negative criticism, 'legitimate' self-interest. They all derive from man's over-weening egotism but instead of attacking them at the root in the name of unselfishness, it is more practicable to train children to recognize each separate manifestation in themselves. It is not sufficient to talk

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about them, children must be helped to recognize and resist them themselves, and the chances of success are incomparably greater in a school where teachers and taught are like senior and junior partners outside the classroom, and where those first principles of growth—freedom and democracy—are applied.

In such schools some of these handicaps may diminish of themselves. An exaggerated feeling of inferiority gives way to confidence where a child has scope as well as affection; cocksureness often becomes unnecessary and uninteresting where opinions are readily exchanged with adults; wishful thinking, even though it never withers away, loses some potency when it comes into the limelight. Negative criticism is a tougher difficulty. It is more sensational to disparage than to weigh up merits and demerits, and for the unintellectual it is the more obvious course. Yet in adolescence, and I think particularly in boys, there is a disposition to fair and detached judgment though it probably only goes with a certain measure of intelligence. This can be nurtured and given the regard it deserves, and more important still, boys and girls can be taught that there is no shame in recanting, in changing one's mind, in admitting that the other person was right after all. Thus impulsive, negative judgments can be amended.

As to what I have called 'legitimate' self-interest there is so much of this, by whatever name it is called, that one would like to see it unmasked in the schools. It is no more than a condoning of that underlying, grasping egotism which is at the root of all our troubles. Why



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aggravate it by extolling ambition and blaming the unambitious people—who are so much more agreeable than the others? Why take seriously the self-pushers who will not even go to a party unless they are likely to meet someone there who will be personally useful to them? Why not let loose some laughter on this whole farce of self-important man?

I have said man, meaning, in this case, literally man, for women when they are self-important are not funny so much as embarrassingly out of place. It is not, surely, for them to proclaim themselves but to be the judges of those that do. It was necessary to ape men to gain equality with men, but with her position recognized, her right to participate in public life accepted, woman can now, if she will, permeate the whole of public life. Standing apart from the local and national competition for limelight she becomes the audience who determines the success of the show, the critic with no axe to grind who applauds the good and ridicules the bad.

The metaphor must not be pressed too far or I will seem to suggest that woman should not herself take part but only look on. On the contrary the way is open. There is so much for her to do if she is so inclined, and as far as my observation goes the women who have a responsibility outside the home are the happier in the home because of it. But by reason of her home, if she has one, and because whether married or single, a woman normally assumes more personal responsibilities towards her relations and neighbours than men, she is less likely to be cast for the grand performances.

## APPENDIX I

### CONSTITUTION FOR A MOCK PARLIAMENT

#### ST. LOYS HOUSE OF COMMONS: STANDING ORDERS

1. The parliament shall be called the St. Loys House of Commons.

2. The times of sittings, the right to membership and the appointment of the Speaker shall rest with the St. Loys Authorities.

3. Members shall normally be required to attend each sitting.

4. Every member shall be required to choose an actual parliamentary division in which she is prepared to interest herself. She shall thereafter be known as the honorary member for that constituency. She shall be expected to answer questions on matters of outstanding importance in her constituency.

5. Members who are nationals of other countries than Great Britain and Northern Ireland shall be entitled 'representatives' of their countries of origin. They shall have the same rights as other members.

6. There shall be a Government party and an Opposition party. The Government party shall consist

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of those who wish to signify that they support the Prime Minister and her Cabinet as competent to produce a satisfactory programme for each sitting.

The Opposition shall consist of those who are prepared, when they deem it necessary, to challenge this competence and to criticize the programme. If the Opposition move and carry a vote of no confidence in the Government, the Government shall resign and the Leader of the Opposition shall form a Cabinet. It shall also be open to the Government to resign at any time.

7. At the beginning of a new parliamentary year all members of the House shall elect a Prime Minister by secret ballot, nominations being first proposed and seconded to the Speaker. Thereafter the parties shall form themselves and the Prime Minister shall appoint her Cabinet which should not normally exceed seven ministers including herself.

8. Members of the Cabinet shall be referred to as Right Honourable. The Officers to be included in the Cabinet shall be determined by the Prime Minister.

9. Every member shall be expected to ask at least one question during a session.

10. Questions shall be addressed by any one member to any other member minister, due notice being given to the member, and the Cabinet being notified.

11. The Cabinet shall meet at a convenient time before each sitting and shall draw up the Orders of the day which shall normally consist of a Question Time followed by Statements and Speeches.

12. Members shall be invited to make themselves

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specialists in subjects which are of interest to themselves and to notify the Government when they have information of interest to give the House.

13. While it is the duty of every member to help in keeping the House informed, either by giving information herself or eliciting it from others, it is also her privilege to get information herself. To this end all members are invited to ask questions either as 'supplementaries' or after speeches and statements.

14. Members are asked always to speak in such a way as to be audible in the Strangers' Gallery.

15. No answers to questions or speeches shall be read from a script without the Speaker's permission.

16. Members are invited at all times to express opinions, whether by definite statement or by the nature of a question or by interruption. Interrupting should be always in parliamentary language. Applause should be in the parliamentary manner.

17. Maiden speeches should be noted on the agenda paper, and should be applauded.

18. At the beginning of each Sitting the Speaker shall take her place in the Chair accompanied by the Clerk of the House whose duty it is to keep a record of proceedings. The Sergeant-at-Arms, who shall see that the seating accommodation is proper and adequate, shall summon the House by calling the 'Speaker is in the Chair'. Members of the House shall then enter and bow to the Chair when they pass the bar.

## APPENDIX II

### CONSTITUTION FOR A SCHOOL

The following constitution comes from the school called Wyngates in this book. The system it embodies was abandoned during the war when some of the school premises were requisitioned and the school had to combine with another. The pupils themselves asked to have it restored and although at liberty to propose radical changes, pupils and staff agreed that the original plan could not be improved on except in minor details.

#### *Principles of the Constitution*

The Constitution of Wyngates is designed to secure full co-operation between staff and girls in the building up of a happy and useful communal life for all. To this end each member of the community is given the opportunity for:

Gaining experience in the problems of dealing with other people, and of sharing in the government of the community by the exercise of responsibility and authority as she becomes fitted for it;

## CONSTITUTION FOR A SCHOOL

Discussing the reason of any rules or penalties imposed, and claiming justice of treatment by an appeal to the judgment of the school;

Learning to understand the points of view of others, more especially as between staff and girls.

### *Citizens and Minors*

The school is divided into Citizens and Minors.

### *Citizens*

Citizenship is conferred upon a girl when she has shown herself capable of taking part in the government of the school, and is willing to accept responsibility and to co-operate with others for the good of the school.

A girl may be proposed for citizenship by any two members of the school. The proposal must go first to Council, who decide whether she is to be regarded as a suitable candidate. If Council's vote is favourable, her name is brought up for consideration at the form meetings, the opinion of each form being given at the subsequent Council Meeting. (All Voters are present and vote.)

A two-thirds majority is necessary for election. The vote is by ballot and the candidate is present.

A Citizen may be degraded or suspended by a vote of the Council.

### *Voters*

Voters are Minors who have the privilege of voting at election of Citizens and of giving an individual vote

## CONSTITUTION FOR A SCHOOL

at School Meetings. They are elected in the following manner:

(i) Any two persons in the school can at any time put a note in the Council Box proposing a Minor as a Voter. Such a Minor must have been a member of the school for at least one full term.

(ii) After discussion at a School Meeting the Minor, if elected, becomes a Voter.

### *Form Representatives*

Form representatives are elected at the beginning of term, and again, if desired, at half-term. Election is by the vote of the form including the form-mistress. In the case of a drawn election the Principal gives a casting vote. The votes are sent to the office to be counted.

Form representatives, who are not Citizens, have the right to attend Council for the discussion of their own form business and that of the forms below their own.

If a form does not support and co-operate with its Form Representative it may be thought advisable for it to lose temporarily its right to have a Form Representative or to be represented at Council.

### *Method of Government*

The school is governed by Council, School Meetings and Form Meetings.

### *Council*

Council consists of Staff, Headgirls chosen by the Staff, Citizens and Form Representatives.

## CONSTITUTION FOR A SCHOOL

Council has the power to deal with all matters concerning the discipline and internal organization of the school, except where health, curriculum and going-out are concerned.

Council meetings are weekly, and must be preceded by Form Meetings.

For all purposes of voting a member of the Staff is regarded as a Citizen.

Any form has the right to appeal to the Principals if it considers a course of lessons to be uninteresting or unhelpful.

### *School Meetings*

School Meetings are of two kinds:

(i) Full School Meetings of the whole school, summoned by the Council, at which Citizens and Voters have individual votes and Minors a collective vote. Decisions reached at these meetings are valid without rectification by Council.

(ii) Informal School Meetings which need not necessarily include Staff may be proposed by any member of the school. Decisions reached at this type of meeting are merely expressions of opinion, and must be referred to Council for further consideration.

### *Changes in the Constitution*

Changes in the Constitution can be made only after discussion at both a Council Meeting and a School Meeting.



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